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Transforming Cash Transfers: Citizens' Perspectives on the Politics of Programme Implementation

NICOLA JONES*, BASSAM ABU-HAMAD**, PAOLA PEREZNIETO[†] & KERRY SYLVESTER[‡]

*Overseas Development Institute, London, UK, **Department of Public Health, Al Quds University, Gaza City, State of Palestine, [†]Independent Consultant, Mexico City, Mexico, [‡]Associação de Nutrição e Segurança Alimentar, Maputo, Mozambique

ABSTRACT *After two decades of cash transfer programming, interest in programme governance and social accountability is growing. Analysts are increasingly realising the importance of issues of politics, power and citizen engagement in shaping programme effectiveness and sustainability. To contribute to a still nascent literature on the politics of programme implementation, this article explores the political economy factors shaping governance and social accountability processes in three established and relatively large-scale unconditional cash transfer programmes in conflict-affected contexts – Mozambique, Palestine and Yemen – drawing on beneficiary and citizen perception data from 2012. We conclude by emphasising the importance of context-specific understandings of demand-side factors.*

1. Introduction

After two decades of experience with cash transfers (CTs) in developing country contexts, there is growing interest in issues relating to programme governance and accountability. Whereas earlier debates focused primarily on issues of targeting and the strengths and weaknesses of programme conditionality (Barrientos, 2013; Fiszbein & Schady, 2009), there is now also an increasing realisation that issues of politics, power and accountability to citizens and to citizen–state relations are of critical importance (Hickey, 2010; Hickey & Mohan, 2008). A growing number of analysts and practitioners alike recognise that poverty and vulnerability are inherently political in nature – in terms of underlying drivers as well as preferred approaches to tackling entrenched poverty and marginalisation (Hickey & Bracking, 2005; Huber, Stephens, & Mustillo, 2008). Fiscal constraints are clearly significant in shaping the contours of national social protection systems, but so too are political attitudes concerning who 'deserves' support and in what form.

Within the emerging body of work on the political economy of social protection, there is a strong emphasis on the politics of adoption of social protection programmes – that is, analysis of the drivers of programme emergence in developing country contexts (UN Research Institute for Social Development [UNRISD], 2010), including in the context of economic crises and subsidy reforms. Research on the politics of implementation is more sparse; our knowledge base on the complex political economy factors shaping programme implementation in different contexts is much more limited.[1] To help address this knowledge gap, this article's overarching objective is to explore the political economy factors shaping programme roll-out in three established and relatively large-scale

Correspondence Address: Nicola Jones, Overseas Development Institute, 203 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8NJ, UK. Email: n.jones@odi.org.uk

unconditional CT programmes in conflict-affected contexts (Mozambique, Palestine and Yemen), drawing on beneficiary and citizen perception data collected in 2012.

In order to understand changing power dynamics between the state and its citizens, political economists typically focus their analysis on the balance of power between institutions and incentive structures for different actors in a given policy arena. To situate our findings within this body of thought, we begin in Section 2 with a brief review of theoretical debates on the politics of social protection, especially in terms of social accountability and programme governance in the context of resource-constrained developing countries. Section 3 provides a brief overview of the qualitative research methodology underpinning our beneficiary and community perceptions study in Mozambique, Palestine and Yemen, and provides justification for our comparative case study approach.

Section 4 discusses our findings regarding the strengths and weaknesses of programme governance and accountability mechanisms in the three flagship CT programmes at the heart of our analysis – Mozambique's Basic Social Subsidy Programme (PSSB); the Palestinian National Cash Transfer Programme (PNCTP) and Yemen's Social Welfare Fund (SWF) – and the extent to which these programmes are engaging effectively with beneficiaries and the broader citizenry. We recognise that CT programmes constitute only one strand of broader national social welfare systems, but, given that such programmes (albeit in varying guises) have been in operation in our case study countries since the mid-1990s, this focus allows for a rich exploration of citizens' perceptions of the nature and quality of state–citizen interactions experienced in the context of CT programme implementation over time. Section 5 presents our conclusions and reflects on lessons for programme governance and accountability in contexts where state-building and the state–citizen contract are nascent at best.

2. Engaging with Theoretical Debates

2.1. The Rise and Evolution of Social Accountability Approaches

Social accountability has emerged as a buzzword among development actors (Ringold, Holla, Koziol, & Srinivasan, 2012), despite there being 'no universally agreed definition of the range of actions that fall within its remit' (Bukenya, Hickey, & King, 2012, p. 10) or, perhaps more importantly, 'little appreciation of what *does not* constitute social accountability' (Joshi & Houtzager, 2012, p. 151). For the purposes of this article, we adopt McNeil and Malena's (2010) definition, which emphasises collaboration rather than confrontation: '"Social accountability" refers to the wide range of citizen and civil society organization (CSO) actions to hold the state to account, as well as actions on the part of government, media, and other societal actors that promote or facilitate these efforts' (p. 1). Whereas 'vertical mechanisms such as elections and horizontal mechanisms such as institutional checks and balances – have often failed to ensure an effective watch on the use of public authority' and have particularly tended to exclude the poor and other vulnerable populations (Joshi, 2007, p. 13), this more collaborative view of social accountability is in keeping with rights-based understandings of social protection, which emphasise the potential for such programmes to contribute to a strengthened social contract between state and citizens (Sepulveda & Nyst, 2012). Moreover, because outcomes rather than processes are key to social accountability, it can focus on 'best fit' rather than 'best practice' (Bukenya et al., 2012; Tembo, 2013; Unsworth, 2010). This means it can use lenses that are culturally sensitive and attuned to local political dynamics as well as deploy a wide range of methods to achieve its objectives, including prospective information campaigns and budget analysis as well retrospective social audits and 'contentious actions' (Bukenya et al., 2012, p. 28; Joshi, 2007; Ringold et al., 2012).

This is not, however, to uni-directionally locate social accountability as a demand-led, bottom-up phenomenon. It must be balanced with supply-side space that allows for both collective action and the realisation of reform. Hickey and Mohan (2008) argue 'we need to take a long-term dynamic and mutually constitutive view of state and society interactions' (p.15) and explore how state institutions

are organised and in turn influence who engages in collective action and around what types of issues. Joshi's rationale is that it would help shift our understanding of social accountability from a purely technical approach to one better rooted in 'a more politically, historically and sociologically attuned understanding of how change unfolds' (Bukenya et al., 2012). As Joshi and Houtzager (2012) conclude, conceptions of social accountability need to move beyond the 'widget' approach, which emphasises specific tools such as score cards and hotlines, to recognition of its more deeply politicised, iterative role as 'watchdog', in which 'the linkages that local collective actors [have] to national policy networks' are often key to success (p.158).

Reforms of existing programming and the establishment of new programming can offer important entry-points for shifting state–citizen interactions. Whether and how public programmes are designed to encourage social accountability – and whether they ultimately deliver on their design features – depends not only on the primary actors but also the power relations between and within them (Bukenya et al., 2012). Public officials, for example, have a key role to play in terms of delivering on accountability demands as well as 'pushing for accountability reforms and even stimulating social actors to mobilise to make demands on government' (Unsworth, 2010, p. 46). Civil society actors are also important, and must not only work with peer organisations to mobilise their constituents but also negotiate with state actors in highly political environments that value interconnectivity over autonomy and sometimes require them to simply get out of the way (Tembo, 2013).

Two overarching factors shape the relationships within and between these actors (Bukenya et al., 2012): the nature of inequality and exclusion and the character of state–society relations. The former has myriad potential impacts on social accountability. For example, traditionally excluded groups are often disenfranchised from even non-institutional mechanisms by lack of time and other resources, but at other times they create their own institutions (Ringold et al., 2012). Similarly, civil society itself is sometimes plagued by clientelism and rent-seeking (Bukenya et al., 2012), and at other times is seen as the solution to public service systems that are 'driven by the politics of patronage' (Hickey, 2010, p. 20). Tembo (2013) further notes that, where multiple players are engaged in social accountability, without clear guidance and oversight mechanisms, an environment of confusion can prevail. Unless citizens have a clear understanding of institutions and their potential role in exercising social accountability, the costs of implementation and sustainability can be high, and lack of harmonisation of programmes and funding may blur the lines of social accountability, principally between society and the state but also between the state and donors. It is therefore critical to understand how cross-agency collaboration and performance can be better incentivised in any given context.

2.2. Social Accountability and Social Protection Programming

In the social protection field, a focus on state–citizen interactions is often prominent as, if designed strategically, programmes may provide 'a space to transform the social relationships that generate and entrench the poverty and vulnerabilities they are addressing' (Jones & Samuels, 2013, p. 46). Indeed, in the case of Latin American conditional CT programmes, efforts to reshape state–citizen relationships have been explicit. Beneficiaries sign contracts of 'co-responsibility' whereby they, as citizens, commit to availing themselves of basic services aimed at poverty reduction and human capital formation (including education, health and nutrition services and birth registration); the state in turn commits to ensuring adequate provision of these services (Fiszbein et al., 2009).

Although social contracts – 'the set of mutual rights and obligations binding citizens with their polity' (Flanagan et al., 1999, p. 135) – are likely to be attributed to more democratic forms of governance (Di John & Putzel, 2009), 'different forms of social contract will emerge in different contexts' (Bukenya et al., 2012, p. 50). Increasingly, social protection programmes are trying to take such diversity into account and embed a variety of approaches in design that encourage citizens to interact with services, providers and policy-makers. Such approaches also help beneficiaries hold programmes and governments accountable by strengthening community bonds, which can result in a more forceful collective voice, and by building the bridges that can link beneficiaries to the power structures that design and run programmes (Narayan & Pritchett, 1999; Ringold et al., 2012).

This said, despite growing interest in the potential of social protection programming to strengthen state legitimacy, and state-building and citizenship in conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts, the evidence base to date is relatively limited (Carpenter, Slater, & Mallett, 2012). Osofian (2011), for instance, finds that, while there is evidence the Hunger Safety Net Programme in northern Kenya, which included a grievance mechanism and a rights education component, has helped communities hold local government to account, Sierra Leone's Social Safety Net Programme, which was subject to elite capture, exacerbated rather than improved citizens' negative perceptions of the state. Merely receiving services from the state does not mean people feel they are citizens of the state; how the state treats them is a critical factor, 'as even if services are of high quality people can still be alienated by treatment without dignity' (Eyben & Ladbury, 2006, as cited in Carpenter et al., 2012, p. 73).

3. Research Methodology and Country Case Selection

3.1. Research Methodology

Our analysis is based on qualitative and participatory research undertaken in three case study countries – Mozambique, Palestine (both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank) and Yemen – by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in partnership with national teams in 2012–2013. While the aim of the primary research was broader than the focus on programme governance and accountability discussed here, all case studies explored linkages between unconditional CTs and beneficiary and citizen perceptions of programme governance and accountability as they affected their own experiences, community dynamics and broader programme efficacy. Research ethics approval processes were adhered to both nationally and internationally as appropriate.[2]

All three studies employed a range of qualitative and participatory instruments, including community mappings; focus group discussions (FGDs) and individual interviews with beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries; key informant interviews (KIIs) at national and sub-national levels; and observational case studies of the programme beneficiary–implementer interface (Table 1). National-level training workshops were held in each country to adapt the research instruments to local context realities and to familiarise the teams with the research conceptual framework, research questions and data collection instruments. The instruments were piloted with local communities and further refined. Sample size was determined by a combination of resource parameters, the importance of triangulating findings across diverse informants using different research tools and the principle of research saturation – that is, reaching a point where additional interviews were garnering no new insights. After obtaining informed consent from research participants, interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed and translated. The analysis

Table 1. Qualitative research instruments in case study country sites

	Mozambique		West Bank		Gaza		Yemen	
Instrument	Chokwe	Chibuto	Hebron	Jenin	Beit Lahia	Rafah	Hodeidah	Taiz
KIIs (district/community/national level)	19		32		18		16	
FGDs	9		13		12		8	
In-depth interviews	22		23		23		14	
Life histories	13		4		4		9	
Case studies	7		4		4		2	
Community, vulnerability and coping strategies mapping	2		2		2		2	
Institutional mapping and historical timeline	2		2		2		2	
Structured observations (# of observations)	6		6		6		5	

was thematically based, using a common thematic matrix, but with scope for country-specific sub-themes to emerge.

3.2. Country Case Study Selection

We adopted a comparative case study approach (Ragin & Becker, 1992; Yin, 2014), with country-level reports for all three of the unconditional CT case studies serving as the key source of information for this article (Bagash et al., 2012; Abu Hamad & Pavanello, 2012; Jones & Shaheen, 2012; Selvester, Fidalgo, & Tambo, 2012). Our starting point was that, whereas individual case studies can illuminate local complexities, a comparative case study approach can help construct more general understandings which go beyond findings from an individual research site (Yin, 2014) and shed light on why particular programmes or components work or fail to work. Here, we were interested in exploring three different conflict-affected contexts as a means to examine the opportunities for and challenges involved in strengthening state–citizen relations in the context of CT programme implementation.

More specifically, our country case selection rationale was as follows: all three countries have had histories of violent civil conflict and are engaged in nascent state-building endeavours; face high levels of poverty and vulnerability; and have long-established social assistance programmes, including unconditional CTs, which have all undergone and/or are undergoing extensive reforms.

These similarities notwithstanding, the three cases are located across a broad spectrum of political institutional settings. Mozambique enjoys the longest distance from a conflict-affected past but national politics remain highly centralised and elite-dominated. Palestine, and especially Gaza, continues to suffer from punctuated conflicts and ongoing occupation, and thus faces truncated state-building and citizenship options. Yemen has the most fragile governance context of the three, suffering very high levels of insecurity and regional fragmentation, to the extent that normal state functioning in at least parts of the country is precluded.

Taking this discussion further, Table 2 first provides an overview of general political economy factors for each case study country. Drawing on Bukenya et al.'s (2012) two-pronged approach to understanding opportunities and entry-points for strengthening social accountability processes and outcomes, it includes i) the nature of inequality and exclusion and ii) the character of state–society relations. It follows this with a brief overview of the social protection sector more specifically, including the extent to which and how social protection is embedded in legal and policy frameworks, the nature of policy spaces for social protection decision-making, fiscal space for social protection and the monitoring and evaluation culture within the social protection 'sector'.

As Table 2 shows, in terms of inequality and exclusion, the three cases vary somewhat. While the Palestinian Authority (PA) and more recently Hamas in Gaza have managed to maintain comparatively strong human development indicators relative to the country's income level, as well as a relatively low level of inequality (measured by the Gini co-efficient) in part due to longer-term investments in social assistance (World Bank, 2011), both Mozambique and Yemen continue to suffer very high levels of human under-development and regional inequalities. As we discuss in more depth below, the latter pose significant challenges to the inclusive uptake of social accountability spaces and processes.

In terms of the character of state–society relations in the three countries, again we see considerable diversity. There are growing efforts to deepen democracy in Mozambique but elite-dominated politics and the absence of a vibrant opposition mean understandings and practices of citizenship remain incipient. In Yemen, persistent fragility and civil violence is resulting in eroding levels of trust in state institutions, although where programmes such as the Social Development Fund are seen to be working the building blocks of more solid state–citizen relations appear to be in place, at least in parts of the country. In Palestine, citizen satisfaction with national leaders is low, but there is nevertheless a relatively strong rights-based culture, whereby citizens are willing and accustomed to speaking out against injustice. PA leaders are in turn relatively responsive to citizen demands, not least because of the regional volatility following the Arab Spring.

These broader political economy dynamics in turn shape social protection programme design and implementation outcomes. As mentioned above, all three countries have well-established social

Table 2. Overview of political economy dynamics in the three case study countries

	Mozambique	Palestine	Yemen
Nature of inequality and exclusion			
Human development	Very low but improving human development indicators. Relatively high Gini co-efficient (45.7).	Relatively strong human development record of PA; Hamas also service-oriented but stagnating and even declining human development indicators in case of Gaza owing to on-going blockade. Relatively low Gini co-efficient (35.5).	Poor human development indicators, especially malnutrition and high food insecurity. Reasonably low Gini co-efficient (37.7).
Economic context	Least developed country status. High levels of extreme poverty and vulnerability, with high levels of regional inequality. Food, fuel and financial crisis resulted in violent uprisings. Growing liberalisation/privatisation of economy.	Lower-middle-income. Artificially truncated economy and labour market. Economic crisis from mid-2007s in Gaza owing to political division and international blockade. Very high reliance on social assistance in Gaza; much lower in West Bank.	Lower-middle-income. Poorest country in Middle East. Significant problems with international capital flight.
Nature of state–society relations			
Political history	Multi-party elections and post-conflict state-building since 1994 but 15 years on from the Peace Accord political discourse is still marked by hostility and mistrust between Frelimo (victorious in all three elections so far) and Renamo, the major opposition party. Mutual suspicion has reduced opportunity for consensus and collaboration, including on reducing extreme poverty and regional disparities exacerbated by the war	Politics as occupation and periodic conflicts. Divided territories and government with growing divide between West Bank and Gaza following withdrawal of Israel from Gaza in 2007 and on-going international blockade.	Politics of fragility – transition in 2011 averted civil war by removing president but not elites from power and provided framework for longer-term political and economic reforms. However, an evaluation of the Social Development Fund, which provides funding for a broad range of social development projects such as education, health and road building, concluded 'it is contributing to the promotion of solid systems of governance that underscore state building' (Jennings, 2006, p. 6)

(*continued*)

Table 2. (*Continued*)

	Mozambique	Palestine	Yemen
Social contract	Incipient citizenship; 'choiceless democracy' (Mwandawire, 1999); elite-dominated politics with only limited power-sharing. Deepening democratisation and wider concern for promoting citizens' rights, however, are compromised by political bi-polarity, weakness of opposition and non-state voices and continuing centralised state control over policy decisions and resource allocation.	Strong critique of national governance structures for failing to resolve the broader political crisis – Israeli occupation and internal division among Palestinian territories. However, partly because of relatively high levels of education, a strong local civil society and high levels of engagement by international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and UN agencies, especially the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), there is a strong discourse of rights and speaking out against injustice. Because of fragility, the national authorities are also very conscious of being seen to respond to citizen demands.	Gallop poll data show low and eroding levels of trust in state institutions. There is uncertainty about whether the current transition is allowing for greater political access or preserving elite interests.
Role of donors	Heavily donor-dependent as one of poorest countries globally. 2012: ODA provided 14% of gross domestic product (GDP).[a]	Heavily aid-dependent in part because of Israeli blockade following second Intifada and dramatic decline in PA tax base. 2012: ODA provided 16.5% of GDP.	Strong donor presence, but more focused on counter-terrorism than development. 2012: ODA provided 2.3% of GDP.

(*continued*)

Table 2. (*Continued*)

	Mozambique	Palestine	Yemen
Social protection context			
National commitment to social protection	Policy commitment to social protection enshrined in National Strategy for Basic Social Security (April 2010), Regulation for Basic Social Security (December 2009) and Social Protection Law (April 2007). Social assistance seen as part of belated peace dividend; also vital in wake of removal of unsustainable subsidy and rationing programmes following the end of conflict in the 1990s. High level of donor dependence to finance social protection and limited buy-in/resistance from Ministry of Finance. DFID and government of the Netherlands support accounts for 30% of the costs of PSSB.	Concept of social security enjoys a strong foundation within the 2003 Palestinian Basic Law; Articles 22 and 25 emphasise rights to social insurance and social security. Protection from extreme poverty is key source of PA legitimacy – especially as the PA is prevented from fulfilling other 'state' roles because of Israeli occupation. High level of donor dependence to finance social protection, but increasing use of PA budget to cover costs of the CT programme.	SWF originally conceived of through the SWF Law in 1996 as a way to compensate the poor for the removal of subsidies. Relatively low level of national commitment to social protection; strongly championed by donors. High level of donor dependency for spending on social protection.
Policy spaces	Council of ministers. Donor–government–civil society working group meetings/ working group on social action. Cross-sectoral poverty reduction planning.	Cabinet meetings. National Tripartite Social Security Committee under the Palestinian Prime Minister (from 2012). Donor–government sector working group meetings .	National Dialogue designed to resolve political crisis of 2011 – but tensions with entrenched networks of patronage.

Notes: [a] See http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.ODA.ODAT.GN.ZS

assistance programmes, and all three have undergone recent reform processes to strengthen CT programme effectiveness. In Mozambique and Palestine, national leaders actively champion social protection. Mozambique promotes it as a peace dividend: unlike many social assistance programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa, PSSB is already being implemented at scale, with the aim of reaching 90 per cent of all eligible beneficiaries across the country by 2014 (Selvester et al., 2012). Similarly, social protection is viewed as a core part of the PA's mandate, given that many other 'typical' state functions are circumscribed on account of the Israeli occupation. However, both countries are heavily reliant on donor funding to realise these broader commitments.

In Yemen, by contrast, the social protection agenda seems strongly donor-driven: overall reliance on official development assistance (ODA) is relatively low but that used for social protection funding is high. The prominent role of donors therefore complicates lines of accountability somewhat, as we discuss further below.

Within the general political economy context parameters described above, it is critical to underscore that social protection policy and programming developments are not static; it is also therefore important to identify potential agents or forces of change. While civil society is relatively active in both Mozambique and Palestine, coordination challenges, funding constraints and limited scale have meant civil society actors have not been a major force in shaping social protection debates and outcomes (Jones & Samuels, 2013). In Yemen, heightened insecurity means the aforementioned challenges are even greater, including for civil society, which has not had an active voice in social protection debates (Bagash et al., 2012). Instead, geopolitics and donor interests – both in general and vis-à-vis social protection – have played a significant role in recent years. In Palestine, donor funding (primarily from the European Union [EU] and the World Bank) accounts for approximately 50 per cent of the PNCTP budget. This commitment is motivated in large part by the realisation that, without a political settlement with Israel, labour market and mobility constraints cannot be solved and social assistance is essential for large segments of the population, especially in Gaza, where the lack of economic opportunities is extreme. In Yemen, donor support is motivated by, on the one hand, grave concerns about on-going political instability and risks of renewed conflict and, on the other, recognition of the importance of strengthening state legitimacy and state institutions if a sustained peace is to be achieved (Bagash et al., 2012).

4. Citizens' Perceptions of Programme Governance and Accountability: Case Study Findings

We now turn to a discussion of the extent to which social accountability approaches are embedded within the three flagship unconditional CT. Table 3 maps programme details for ease of reference; space constraints mean details on the specific sites in each country can be found in the underlying country reports (Bagash et al., 2012; Abu Hamad & Pavanello, 2012; Jones & Shaheen, 2012; Selvester et al., 2012). In light of Joshi's definition of social accountability guiding our analysis, which emphasises the range of citizen and CSO actions to hold states accountable, as well as government, media and other actors' efforts to encourage such efforts, we focus our discussion on i) communication about the programme by the state and implementers to beneficiaries and the broader public; ii) uptake and quality of spaces for interaction and feedback embedded within the programme; and iii) accessibility, transparency and efficacy of grievance mechanisms. Given the contested nature of social protection, poverty and vulnerability across contexts, however, we begin by looking at needs interpretation and citizens' perceptions of the way CT programmes identify and interpret their needs through programme targeting modalities.

4.1. Citizens' Perceptions of Needs Interpretation and the Role of Social Protection More Broadly

While there is increasing emphasis in international development circles on rights-based approaches to social protection, as highlighted by the International Labour Organization's Social Floor Initiative, the extent to which such an approach has been embraced and operationalised in diverse developing

Table 3. Overview of social transfer programmes in case study countries

	Occupied Palestinian Territories		Yemen	Mozambique
	West Bank	Gaza		
Name, start date	PNCTP; 2010 in West Bank; 2011 in Gaza (although amalgamation of earlier cash transfer programmes funded by EU, World Bank and PA dating from mid-1990s)		SWF; 1996	PSSB; 1992
Transfer amount, frequency	NIS750–1800 ($195–468)		Maximum monthly benefit of YER4,000 ($20) for family of 6 people	MZN130 (approximately $4.5) to MZN380 ($13); increments of MZN50 ($1.8) for each dependant
Target group	Focus on **extremely poor households**; consideration also given to female-headed households, people with disabilities, people with chronic illnesses and older people		Original targeting focused on **vulnerable groups** but since 2008 includes all people living below the poverty line, using proxy means test (PMT), with a plan to gradually phase out those who meet vulnerability targeting but not PMT targeting	Permanently **labour-constrained households** that are extremely poor
Reach	Approximately 120,000 households	Approximately 48,000 families.	Approximately 1,500,000 beneficiaries	261,519 beneficiaries as of 2012, of whom 13,125 were households with people with disabilities

country contexts is more limited. Silva et al.'s (2012) regional review of social protection systems in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region highlighted, for example, that, historically, MENA countries have relied on universal subsidies of basic consumer goods and targeted assistance to specific vulnerable groups (orphans, widows, the disabled), but they are gradually transitioning to a greater emphasis on poverty-targeted social assistance. This has been influenced in part by the post-Arab Spring climate, with strong pressures to create a new social contract between the state and citizenry that is more inclusive while at the same time ensuring redistribution systems are fiscally sustainable.

Such shifts, however, represent macro-level trends rather than necessarily resonating with local community perceptions about programme needs interpretation processes. In the case of Gaza and the West Bank, our study found considerable citizen distrust about the new emphasis on poverty targeting and complaints of 'injustice' and 'unfairness' because of a focus on assets rather than disposable income. The former may have been acquired long ago when labour market opportunities were less challenging, or through relatives. There were also concerns that, by focusing on material poverty rather than citizen entitlements, attention was being displaced from the broader structural and political vulnerabilities facing the Palestinian population. As one young male refugee beneficiary in Rafah, Gaza explained, *'PNCTP is a compensation for the Palestinian people, because they have been uprooted and displaced.'*

In Yemen, respondents in smaller, tighter-knit rural communities perceived the programme targeting process to be fair as it relied on the oversight of traditional community leaders, who are *'best placed to make accurate decisions about their communities'*. By contrast, in larger urban sites the move to poverty-based targeting was widely criticised, as it was applied inconsistently, including to non-deserving party supporters, and largely excluded young people, who it saw as better able to generate an income despite very high rates of youth unemployment. As one 40-year-old non-beneficiary said: *'I was not selected because I am not politically oriented and not a member of any party.'*

In Mozambique, PSSB has strong indigenous roots and, as mentioned above, was not donor-driven but rather has been operating at scale for several decades as part of the ruling party's socialist ethos on the one hand and a desire on the other to shore up political support when its popular subsidy programme had to be discontinued in the late 1990s. PSSB too has recently moved away from a categorical to a poverty-based targeting approach, but, because of limited community awareness of programme mechanics and targeting approaches, respondents had little to say about programme needs interpretation, and were merely waiting to see if they would be selected. Those who were included did not view the PSSB as their right but rather as a 'gift' from the state or God, indicating that notions of citizenship central to social accountability processes will require active fostering and support over time.

4.2. Programme Communication and Information Provision

Social transfer programmes implemented in resource-poor settings often have complex institutional arrangements, including multi-layered targeting and payment procedures that change over time, and are implemented by a wide range of actors (paid and unpaid). Few of these programmes invest in strategic communication approaches to beneficiaries and wider communities, given resource and capacity constraints. However, the web of relationships, rules and procedures involved mean there is ample opportunity for miscommunication – both deliberate and through happenstance. This is especially so in the case of reforms, which all three case study programmes have undergone in recent years.

In Mozambique's PSSB, there were several key areas of divergence between official definitions and community perceptions of potential eligible households, stemming from inadequate information outreach to communities. Officially, the programme targets extremely poor households where all members are permanently labour-constrained, defined as households with women over 55 years and men over 60 years, children below 18 years, people living with severe physical or mental disability or people with chronic illness that renders them unable to work. Our research, however, found that, because PSSB was originally seen as a grant for older indigent people, communities continued to

make this assumption; indeed, disabled people who received the transfer reported feeling they were not entitled to the money.

Another key misunderstanding was that the transfer targets individuals rather than households; this results in low uptake of additional money for carers and dependants, as well as mistrust of the system in cases where the transfer is suspended owing to changes in the status of household members that affect their entitlement (such as when a child turns 18 or a member of the family marries an able-bodied adult).

Part of the problem is that there are no written materials clearly explaining the application procedures for potential beneficiaries, including rules and regulations and grievance procedures that could be used during community group meetings and household visits. Although potential beneficiaries may not be able to read official materials, the availability of written materials can safeguard against inaccurate messages. In all communities there are mediation forums that can be used to clarify the rights of beneficiary households, but these are in practice hampered by limited access to information as well as limited demand from beneficiaries.

Inadequate communication and information dissemination about programme entitlements emerged as a major source of citizen concern in Palestine also. Major reforms of PNCTP in 2010, involving a shift from categorical to poverty-based targeting using a PMT formula (PTMF), were inadequately communicated to key stakeholders, including beneficiaries. As one widow in a FGD in Aroub refugee camp in the West Bank complained, *'Correct information is the people's treasure, but we rarely get it.'* Similarly, a beneficiary woman in Jenin equated the PMTF with '*the secret Coca-Cola formula'*. Moreover, while there were efforts to broadcast information about the changes and registration process through Palestinian National TV, staff from the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), the implementing agency, were inadequately prepared to manage the process. As highlighted through interviews with MoSA staff at governorate level during our research, they still have an incomplete understanding of the details of and rationale behind the PMTF approach, which means they are unable to communicate the reasons for the reforms to either beneficiaries or non-beneficiaries.

As a result, FGDs and individual interviews highlighted multiple concerns relating to indicators, transparency and the formula itself, and expressed a high level of discontent with MoSA. As a middle-aged male non-beneficiary in Beit Lahia, Gaza, angrily noted, '*What really matters when they* [referring to MoSA] *select someone is the colour of the shirt one wears* [referring to green for Hamas and yellow for Fatah supporters].*'* In the West Bank there were fewer complaints along party lines, but there were similarly high levels of discontent on account of inadequate communication by programme implementers. As one Bedouin woman beneficiary from Anata, Jerusalem, noted, '*Even if we were hanging by a rope they would not help us! They don't tell us anything* [about other services and entitlements] – *only from each other and our neighbours do we learn about our rights*.'

Experiences with Yemen's SWF were not dissimilar. District offices manage SWF daily operations, including registration of potential new beneficiaries. Yet our findings indicate that not only do staff in these offices lack authority to make decisions on beneficiary selection, but also the community leaders who do have more decision-making authority frequently suffer from limited information about important programme details and linkages to other social protection interventions. These information deficits effectively constrain the accountability of implementing agencies and national government to citizens, and are in turn compounded by citizens' lack of information about how the programme operates or its selection criteria. As one female beneficiary from Zabid noted, *'They say it is from the government for the poor people and those who have limited income* [. . .] *All those who receive it deserve it as they are jobless and poor.'* Accordingly, there is limited capacity to demand accountability from local authorities, particularly as there is a concern among beneficiaries that they might be sanctioned or taken off the list of beneficiaries if they complain, especially in Taiz, an urban and more politicised district.

4.3. Feedback Channels and Spaces for Interaction

In the face of the complex programme implementing environments discussed above, institutionalising regular information provision and feedback channels is an important part of working towards and

strengthening the social contract between the state and its citizens. On the supply side, messages about social transfer programmes need to be standardised across all actors; key features of the system need to be explained, in written form and orally. On the demand side, it is important to have spaces for interaction and feedback among beneficiaries, and between beneficiaries and programme implementers. Institutionalised spaces ensure problems or concerns are detected quickly and help providers gauge community responses to reforms or new features.

In Mozambique, community meetings are the most frequently used medium of communication within PSSB, given high levels of illiteracy. When well facilitated and there is space for women to meet separately, respondents noted that they did avail themselves of such opportunities. There is also provisioning for follow-up dialogues with individual beneficiaries using community liaison agents selected by the community to act as brokers between them and the implementing agency, the National Institute of Social Action (INAS). These agents are, in theory, accountable to both the community and INAS; the community can request replacement of the agent if they are not satisfied, and INAS can remove the agent if he or she is judged not to be performing satisfactorily. However, this role is not without problems, given the lack of formal training and the fact that, particularly in rural areas, the person most often selected by the community is also the government's official representative in the area – a voluntary post that inevitably wields considerable local power. The lack of an independent liaison agent and effective checks and balances on power therefore hampers transparency and opportunities to exercise social accountability.

More recently, a Civil Society Platform has been established to provide a forum for civil society actors to voice their ideas and concerns about social protection policies and programming. However, the reach of this participatory monitoring system has to date been limited to a small pilot. Although funding has been secured to expand the approach in a second phase, key informants were of the view that there was little likelihood of countrywide coverage, given cost constraints, unless evidence of clear and significant impact can be documented.

Opportunities for information exchange and feedback between citizens and programme implementers are significantly more constrained in the Palestinian context. The only opportunity for interaction among beneficiaries is on payment days at the banks. In some cases, bank queues provide opportunities for information exchange and networking; in other cases, they give rise to tensions (because of long waiting times) or no interaction at all (that is, some people collect their money without engaging with others). As bank staff are responsible for disbursing payments, the delivery mechanism does not provide an opportunity for beneficiaries to interact directly with programme staff. Instead, since the 2010 programme reforms, the primary interaction between social workers and beneficiaries (or unsuccessful applicants) takes place during short (15–30 minute) home visits when social workers come to assess whether the household is still eligible according to the PMTF poverty criteria. A middle-aged woman beneficiary from Jenin camp noted for instance during the research process that, *'This is the first time that anyone listened to us deeply and in detail. We really appreciate this opportunity.'*

In the West Bank, social workers and beneficiaries alike emphasised there was seldom time to discuss broader vulnerabilities and needs, unless the situation was already very serious (for example child custody contestations or cases of serious child abuse). As a female FGD participant in the Aroub camp, near Hebron, emphasised. *'MoSA officials should come and see themselves and listen to us about our views on the programme.'* Social workers have been effectively removed from the selection process as eligibility is now determined by the PMTF alone, rather than taking into account information obtained during social workers' home visits, to assess the situation of the household as a whole. While this has helped reduce the potential for clientelistic relationships between social workers and beneficiaries, it has also reduced social workers' sense of professional ownership and buy-in. As one social worker from Jenin governorate in the West Bank noted, '*I feel guilty and powerless – I cannot explain why some people are excluded or included. So I can listen to people's problems but I can't really do much. I just gather information but don't have a role in decision-making. It is a very frustrating working environment*.' In other words, despite the existence of a cadre of trained social workers, the very high caseload and the time-consuming nature of the PMT poverty targeting approach mean there is also very little space for social workers to play a more meaningful bridging role between

beneficiaries and programme implementers at the governorate level, and even less so at the national level. Given the complexity of the PMTF, social workers reported feeling they had essentially become data collectors, with the bulk of their work now centred on filling out forms rather than providing the specialist psychosocial support they have been trained to do. In the words of one social worker, *'We feel as if we are machines*.'

In Gaza, information flows are weaker still. This is perhaps not surprising, given the strained relationship between MoSA Ramallah and MoSA Gaza (stemming from the political division between the two territories in 2006/07), and the fact that it remains challenging to establish information flows and coordination mechanisms between the two agencies. There is no channel beneficiaries can use to convey their needs and interests to higher decision-making levels, which is reportedly resulting in high levels of stress, frustration and suspicion between beneficiaries and implementers. Many beneficiaries, however, emphasised that they would be eager to have opportunities to come together to express their views about the programme and how it could be improved, as well as to socialise and find support among other beneficiaries. Indeed, when asked about which services they would like to see complementing PNCTP, many of these women said they would value a space where they could meet and openly discuss problems and solutions.

> *We meet each other only at MoSA, UNRWA and the bank. When we meet we talk about our concerns and situation, but there are no places where we can raise our voices and speak up. It would be great if these places existed. But in these places the people we speak to should also be in a position to help us. They should be people in charge and who can decide and can provide us with the things we really need*. (female beneficiary, 45 years old, Rafah, Gaza)

Efforts to institutionalise effective links with community stakeholders in programme governance have also proved challenging, but for different reasons. In the West Bank, social workers are expected to collaborate with local social protection committees to identify potential beneficiaries and screen those who are eligible. However, in practice, instead of holding regular meetings with a full committee, in governorates where the committees are functioning social workers most often call on individual members as an information resource to discuss particular cases. Moreover, social workers did recognise that clientelistic practices, or *wasta*, remain a problem in some instances. Some beneficiaries echoed this viewpoint: '*The protection committee is a big lie. They support those with whom they have interests. I went to them and asked for help but they said nowadays there is no financial assistance. I shouted and said, "You are not fair", but they told me to shut up'* (female beneficiary, 38 years old, Jenin camp, West Bank).

In Gaza, regional social protection committees have not been established, thus household eligibility is determined solely through the PMTF, which is centralised in Ramallah. There are very limited, if any, possibilities for further investigation when an applicant is deemed ineligible. While there is supposed to be a suggestion box in each MoSA office, only a handful of beneficiaries said they had seen them, and, during a structured observation in the MoSA office in Rafah, no complaint box was seen. Among those who said they had seen complaint boxes, some noted they were placed more *'for decoration'* than for collecting and meaningfully acting on beneficiaries' feedback.

In Yemen, formal spaces for information exchange and feedback are similarly weak, and beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries complained about this dearth of spaces. As in Palestine, there are some informal exchanges among beneficiaries on payment day while queuing at the post office to receive the transfer. Generally, though, beneficiaries emphasised that they were not vocal about their concerns or the lack of spaces to express them, as they feared being taken out of the programme. However, some informal approaches are being adopted to fill this gap. Beneficiaries emphasised the important role played in information provision by local community leaders, who were deemed to '*know more about us'* than outsiders, especially in Zabid, where local leaders enjoy considerable legitimacy:

> *I had not been a leader* [...] *a representatives of SWF came and started talking with other leaders about the need for assistance in their survey to select poor people* [...] *After that the head*

> *of the local council addressed me, saying in front of everyone that, "From today onwards, you are one of the leaders." Ever since, I have been assisting many families and guiding them to join SWF. Some of them had never heard about it or dreamt about being a beneficiary. Recently, even the security office asked me to handle some conflicts between people on property, divorce and so on* [. . .] *Although working with the poor is so tough in our area given their very large numbers, the feeling of respect by the poor and community members means a lot to me and has been motivating me to keep working with them*. (male community leader, Zabid)

4.4. Grievance Channels

In addition to information dissemination and feedback loops, grievance channels provide a third critical mechanism through which citizens can engage in programme governance and accountability processes. Among our case studies we found stark differences in citizen perceptions vis-à-vis the accessibility, transparency and effectiveness of programme grievance mechanisms. In Palestine, programme beneficiaries typically saw their involvement in PNCTP as their right rather than as a gift or charity – especially in Jenin, in the West Bank, where there is a strong rights-based culture fostered by a substantial NGO presence, as these quotes highlight:

> *This is better than a hand-out. It is my right*. (older female beneficiary, Hebron)

> *You* [talking to a bank official] *must pay me this until I'm dead. This is my right. You do not pay it from your pockets*. (older female beneficiary, Jenin, West Bank)

Complaints about PNCTP can be either communicated in writing and posted in local district office complaints boxes or made verbally to social workers or NGOs who in turn record and communicate them to the Ramallah-based Complaints Unit within MoSA. Nevertheless, respondents were relatively negative about the value of utilising grievance and complaints channels, and expressed low levels of confidence in the system, especially in Gaza, where there is a concern that social workers may intercept and manipulate information presented through grievances:

> *Our complaints are communicated to social workers. We complain, but nothing happens* [. . .] *There are no benefits from these complaints. We don't know if our complaints reach the director or the ministry*. (middle-aged female, Jenin camp, West Bank)

> *How can one raise a complaint against the judge?* (male, middle-aged ex-beneficiary, Beit Lahia, Gaza)

In addition, the complaints data management system remains uncomputerised, further hindering staff capacity to respond to citizens in a timely and systematic manner. The head of the Complaints Unit (CU) in Ramallah estimated they were able to address just 40–50 per cent of complaints made, given resource and capacity constraints. Nonetheless, CU staff do seem to approach their role from a strong citizens' rights perspective, suggesting that, if technological shortcomings can be addressed, they could play a more proactive role in future:

> *Our role is not only responding to people's complaints but we find ourselves as advocates for their rights and this is not always positively received by some managers of the different programmes*. (Complaints Unit head, Ramallah, West Bank)

In the case of Yemen, SWF officials said they were open to receiving complaints from beneficiaries but there is no official grievance system, and respondents were generally reluctant to complain for fear of being withdrawn from the programme as reporting is not anonymous.

> *There was political intervention in the past, but after the involvement of the social workers in the process this did not occur so much. But in rural areas there is still a kind of political intervening*. (male informal community leader, Zabid)

There were reports, however, of informal action being undertaken to address grievances, suggesting that at least some beneficiaries have a stronger perception of the cash transfer as a right rather than as a gift. One case where pressure brought to bear by beneficiaries was reported to have led to change was in Zabid. Here, following prolonged community and beneficiary complaints about poor treatment during cash distribution at the local post office (where some workers were charging 'commission' to make the payment), the manager of the post office was replaced in an effort to minimise abuse of the system.

Citizen perceptions about grievance channels in Mozambique contrasted sharply with those in the Middle Eastern case studies. Here, the main constraint does not appear to be the design of the PSSB grievance system itself, but rather people's lack of understanding of the underlying principles of social transfer programmes. In theory at least, as discussed in Section 2, social transfer programmes are based on an agreement on the rights and responsibilities of the participating entities – a social contract between the state and citizens, including vis-à-vis the right of vulnerable citizens to receive an appropriate social transfer on a regular basis. In Mozambique, our findings indicated people had no sense of entitlement to the PSSB transfer, and, because they viewed the money as a gift provided by a benevolent state, they felt they should not complain, as to do so would be ungrateful. As one female beneficiary in Chokwe noted, '*Why would I question the type of present I am given?'*

5. Conclusions

Overall, our findings underscore the importance of enhancing our collective understanding of the politics of programme implementation if social protection policy frameworks and programming are to respond better to citizen experiences of poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion and to achieve sustainable changes in beneficiary lives. Our case studies revealed a growing interest in and demand for stronger social accountability mechanisms to be embedded in social protection programming, not least in challenging conflict-affected contexts. While respondents across the three case study countries were all eager to see transfer amounts increased and payments made more regularly (Jones and Samuels, 2013), so too were they consistent in calling for greater beneficiary involvement in programme governance and oversight. In other words, addressing material poverty and vulnerability is undoubtedly of critical importance, but chronically poor and vulnerable people are also demanding to be treated with dignity in the context of social protection programming. For some, this was as simple as having more accessible information about programme provisions, for others there was a strong desire to improve communication channels and to insist on more respectful relationships and the systematic provision of spaces and channels for regular communication between service providers and beneficiaries. Our case study findings also underscored a strong interest in embedding mechanisms within cash transfer programmes so programme implementers can be better held to account, including for abuses of power.

In terms of the lessons about social accountability processes that emerged from our comparative analysis of three conflict-affected but quite divergent political economic settings, our findings underscored the need to focus first on the extent and nature of citizen demand for social accountability. In contexts of 'choiceless democracy' like Mozambique, which also suffer from high levels of inequality and social exclusion, and where understandings of citizenship and a state–citizen social contract are weak, if awareness of citizen entitlements and the right to complain if treated unfairly are not proactively fostered, supply-side provisioning of social accountability feedback loops and grievance mechanisms are unlikely to gain traction at community-level. As Corbridge, Williams, Srivastava, and Véron (2005) have highlighted, however, a sense of citizenship typically evolves from 'seeing the state' – through face-to-face interactions with local state representatives – thus working through non-

politicised community agents to increase awareness about eligibility and the scope of entitlements could be an important first step.

By contrast, in contexts like Palestine, where there is already a robust understanding of citizen rights and entitlements fostered by an active civil society and international supporters (INGOs and UN agencies alike), facilitating spaces and channels for citizens to voice and share their views about the programme implementation process would appear to be an appropriate entry-point for strengthening social accountability processes and outcomes. Engagement at this level has the potential not only to secure a greater sense of programme buy-in and legitimacy by participants (a critical resource for programme 'champions' within the state) but also to lead to creative and more effective programming adaptations by securing real-time feedback on what programme components are working well, why and where.

Finally in highly insecure and fragile environments like Yemen, where national government commitment to social protection agendas is not strong and funding for social transfers is heavily donor-dependent, tackling the risk of clientelistic practices and politicised distribution of transfers emerges as a precondition for any social accountability process, given very low levels of citizen trust. It would also appear that social accountability approaches may need to be tailored to sub-national conditions. Where local leaders enjoy legitimacy, working through them to encourage programme information provision and feedback loops could be a possibility. In less cohesive environments, emphasising transparent ways of working with related information provided in widely accessible oral and written formats may be a more fruitful option.

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