Creating Sustainable Pathways for Beneficiaries of the Child Support Grant (CSG) in South Africa

By Prof. Ndangwa Noyoo
University of the Johannesburg,
Presented at the International Conference on Sustainability of Social Protection in the SADC 20-21 October 2015
Parktonian Hotel, Braamfontein, Johannesburg, South Africa
Since its inception in 1996, the Child Support Grant (CSG) in South Africa has helped to alleviate chronic poverty in the country and has been extended extensively to cover a wider population than was initially envisaged.

Many theorists, policy-makers, civil society actors and politicians have extolled the value of the CSG in playing a “cushioning effect” against want in so far as the poorest segments of the society are concerned.

On the other hand, there are many people in the country who have expressed the view that the CSG, among other social grants, is placing an undue strain on the fiscus, whilst many have also noted that it is not sustainable.
The foregoing sentiment has even been echoed by sections of the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC).

Furthermore, the economy’s lackluster performance and the high levels of unemployment in the last couple of years have only gone to cement the notion that the CSG is proving to be unsustainable or will eventually not be buoyed up by the public purse in the long run.
This paper contends that both viewpoints have some merit but are not wholly plausible and therefore a middle ground needs to be struck in order to not only accommodate both perspectives but also to actually provide workable solutions to a seemingly unsustainable situation.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to advance concrete and sustainable pathways for the CSG in South Africa even in a constrained economic environment.
This approach is underwritten by the capabilities approach and notion of active citizenry proposed by the National Development Plan (NDP). It is also predicated on long-term strategic outlook. The NDP seeks to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality in South Africa by 2030. It also envisages a country wherein all citizens have the capabilities to the ever-broadening opportunities available and to change the life chances of millions of South Africans, especially the youth - that remain stunted by the history of apartheid.
CSG in perspective

- The country’s elaborate social assistance programme, with slightly over 16 million beneficiaries disburses: the *old age grant*, *war veterans’ grant*, *disability grant*, *foster care grant*, *care dependency grant* and the *child support grant* (CSG).
- The largest numbers of beneficiaries are on the child support grant.
- The number of child support grant beneficiaries has risen from 5.7 million in 2004/05 to about 11.4 million as a result of the increase in the eligibility age to a child’s 18th birthday (National Treasury, 2013).
Building the CSG beneficiaries for South Africa’s overall development through Evidence-based policy decision-making

- First and foremost, in order to have a sustainable CSG Programme, there is a need to identify, plot and determine where all the CSG beneficiaries are.

- Much of this information is scattered in various government data sets and thus needs to be centralised and co-ordinated in order to pin-point where the children are in terms of household, neighbourhood, ward, town and province.

- Linked to this will be the care-givers whose profiles would also need to be established in regard to creating economic pathways out of poverty for the CSG beneficiaries.

- The former can only be possible if the notion of “joined up” government is crystallised and that there is a robust evidence-based government-wide information system that speaks to other systems of government.
Flowing from this would be the need to plot the children on the CSG from 0-24 and follow them through primary school to tertiary levels via a case management approach where Social Workers and other social service professionals follow-up on the children’s educational, nutritional, and health needs - from childhood to young adulthood - so as to create clear and viable pathways out of poverty.

This approach would also lead to “smart targeting” of CSG beneficiaries by enabling former CSG beneficiaries to study either in Cuba, South African universities, colleges, *free-of-charge, but bonded to government for at least three years*.

In those three years, they would be expected to work in rural communities in hospitals, etc., in order to also “give back”.
Another way would be to “ring-fence” CSG beneficiaries from 0-24 years. Targeting this population would actually allow the government to create a whole new group of South Africans (who were previously disadvantaged).

After 24 years they would be educated, highly skilled and contributing tax which would again be used to invest in the foregoing - thus becoming a virtuous cycle.
Mainstreaming the mothers or care givers of children on the CSG into the economy

- Building the capabilities of mothers or care-givers of the children on the CSG through “ring-fenced” government procurement mechanisms (after ample training and start-up capital) in the areas of: **School feeding schemes, cleaning of government offices, laundry services** at government institutions such as prisons, hospitals, etc., or making uniforms for prisoners, etc.
- These women would be the **service providers or private** companies.
- The conditionality here would be that the women formed co-operatives and also played a key role in the education of their children.
References