Indigenous Social Security Systems in Zambia: Advancing a Public Policy Agenda?

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Introduction and background

- This work derives its essence from an understanding that presently, there are many scholars, governments, and other actors advocating for more social security systems in Africa.
- However, there seems to be a dearth of actions that seek to bring into the mainstream Indigenous Social Security Systems.
- Momentarily, it seems as if the main social security forms that are being envisaged in Africa are the formal and Eurocentric models.
- Also, there are not many intellectual forays into the area of Indigenous Social Security Systems in Africa and how they can be interlinked with formal government programmes.
Purpose and scope of the study

- Given the foregoing, there was a need to undertake a research study in order to determine the extent to which African governments had sought, or not endeavoured, to mainstream Indigenous Social Security Systems in their formal policy regimes.

- The research assumed that in most African countries, the Eurocentric version of social security still predominated and seemed to be the most preferred form of social security by African governments and their development partners in the name of donors and international non-governmental actors.
Indeed, despite Indigenous Social Security Systems serving as substitutes for the formal arrangements in Africa, anecdotal evidence seems to paint a different picture and even shows that they are playing crucial roles in staving off abject poverty and destitution in most African countries.

On the other hand, there is no compelling evidence that shows that African governments are making efforts or have even incorporated these indigenous approaches into their formal policy mechanisms.

Thus the need for a study of this nature. The research also moves from a normative position, asking whether states should adopt indigenous practices, and not merely whether they do.
The research study covered two regions of Africa, namely, Southern Africa, which focused on countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC); and West Africa – which focused on the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Research Objectives:

1. To determine the existence of Indigenous Social Security Systems in Southern and West Africa.
2. To find out how Indigenous Social Security Systems are being utilised by ordinary people in countries in the regions of Southern and West Africa.
3. To investigate and determine whether governments in the regions of Southern and West Africa incorporate Indigenous Social Security Systems into mainstream government public policies and public policy responses.
4. To make recommendations on how Indigenous Social Security Systems can be incorporated into mainstream public policies in Southern and West Africa.
Conceptual Thrust

- In pre-colonial times, different societies had various ways of meeting the needs of their members. All societies at the time had informal modalities of looking after those who were disadvantaged and could not fend for themselves.

- It is a universal fact that almost all pre-colonial societies had created mechanisms, over the centuries, to safeguard people’s well-being. Thus, informal systems that responded to human needs predominated in the pre-industrial age where communal existence defined social interaction.

- For those who were considered vulnerable or in need, they were initially looked after by their families in simple societies.
In pre-colonial Africa the extended family system met the needs of individuals through strong bonds of solidarity and networks of reciprocity. As societies became more complex, both state and non-state actors such as the religious and voluntary sectors, complemented the efforts of families (Noyoo, 2015).

The family was the first form of defence against want and deprivation as it provided for the emotional, material and spiritual support of its members. Mutual-help reinforced family solidarity as adults provided for the needs of children whilst the elderly socialised them. Children supplied labour and companionship to parents and grandparents (Boon, 2007).
Formal definitions of Social Security

- Historically, social protection has formed the core of social policy. It comprises **social insurance, social assistance** and the central element of **family care and solidarity**.

- Based on contributions, **social insurance is a tool for mitigating lifecycle risks and covers such risks as illness, unemployment, old age and injury**.

- **Social assistance**, a tool for poverty alleviation, is generally financed from the public budget and may take the form of **financial assistance to people in need** or **subsidies** (Economic & Social Commission for Western Asia, 2009).
Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS)

- In this discussion, Indigenous Social Security Systems are seen as derivatives of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS).
- The latter underpin the former.
- By way of definition, the word *indigenous* refers to the root, something natural or innate (to). It is an integral part of culture.
- Taken further, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) refer to the combination of knowledge systems encompassing technology, social, economic and philosophical learning, or educational, legal and governance systems.
It is knowledge relating to the technological, social, institutional, scientific and developmental, including those used in liberation struggles (Odora-Hoppers, 2002).

Indigenous knowledge is associated with the term “local knowledge” or “ethnoscience”, indicating knowledge systems that are specific to cultures or groups in particular social or historical context (Seleti, 2013).

In regard to the above-mentioned, it can be seen that Indigenous Social Security Systems and IKS are also cultural specific.
When considering how much a given agent such as the state ought to aid those targeted by social protection, it is natural to think that it should do so to the maximum degree (subject to available resources).

In regard to Indigenous Social Security an agent’s intentions also matter morally, which, under certain conditions, means that it could be appropriate to trade off some degree to which others are actually aided (Metz, 2016).
The Zambian Segment

- This presentation focuses on the Zambian segment of the research.
- Indigenous social security systems have been in existence in Zambia for centuries, even prior to colonial rule.
- Most of them derive their meaning from the traditional systems of the country’s 72 ethnic groups.
- The formal social security system was established in colonial Zambia, then known as Northern Rhodesia, after the country was colonised by Great Britain in 1924.
- Previously, Northern Rhodesia had been administered by the British South Africa Company (BSAC) as two separate territories of North-Western and North-Eastern Rhodesia, from 1911-1924.
The formal welfare system in colonial Zambia, as in other British African colonies, came on the back of the Great Depression of the late 1920s and 1930s, and also after Britain passed the Colonial Development Act in 1929.

After the Department of Social Welfare was established in 1950, services were mainly targeted at the poorer sections of the white settler population in Zambia and partly at the Coloured (Bi-racial) and Indian populations in what was known as the Colour Bar System.

Africans were expected to be looked after by their extended families – this was the official British Colonial Policy governing the African population in colonial Zambia.

Therefore, the formal social security system was a sub-set of the formal social welfare system of colonial Zambia.
After Zambia got its independence on 24 October 1964, the colonial legacy continued in the area of social protection.

In 1966 the Zambia National Provident Fund (ZNPF) was established.

The ZNPF aimed, among other things, to enable aged persons to enjoy some measure of financial independence based on contributions made during their working days (Department of Social Welfare, 1966).

Although well intended, the ZNPF confined itself to those in formal employment and did not cater for those in self-employment or the informal sector. Thus there was more focus on social security and social insurance measures as opposed to social assistance in Zambia (Noyoo, 2013).
Despite being overlooked by various Zambian Governments, Indigenous Social Security Systems were very instrumental in cushioning the adverse effects of the country’s economic austerity measures in the early 1990s, when Zambia was strictly adhering to the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

At best, the formal social security systems had either collapsed or were severely compromised by the SAP. Despite this, indigenous social security systems seem to exist on the peripheries of Zambia’s public policy agenda.
After 51 years of independence, Zambian policy-makers seem to be giving more preference to Western forms of social security than to indigenous ones.

The objectives of the Zambian segment of the research study were:

- To establish whether public policy-making incorporates Indigenous Social Security Systems;
- To solicit views from respondents on how Indigenous Social Security Systems could be mainstreamed in policy-making in Zambia;
- To recommend to policy makers and all relevant stakeholders on how Indigenous Social Security Systems could be mainstreamed in policy-making in Zambia.
Data Collection

- The data for this study was collected via questionnaires which were administered to individuals who were purposefully sampled.
- There were two categories of respondents, namely, Government officials working for Government Departments or Municipalities and secondly ordinary people who are professionals or semi-professionals with knowledge on policy formulation.
- For comparison’s sake and also to ensure that data collected represented all areas of the country, the participants were drawn from both rural and urban set-ups.
- The urban set-up was basically the Capital City of Zambia, Lusaka, with an estimated population of 2,191 (Central Statistical Office, 2011).
In terms of the rural area, the town of Katete, which is located in the Eastern Province of Zambia was sampled.

It has an estimated population of 268,852. Secondly, the urban set-up was basically the national which in this case was Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia with an estimated population of 2,191,2,191(Central Statistical Office, 2011).
Preliminary Findings

- **Theme one - Knowledge/awareness on Indigenous Social Security Systems:** It was evident that most Government stakeholders both at National and Local levels were fully aware of the existence of Indigenous Social Security Systems in Zambia.

- In addition, about 75% of the officials had taken a step further and provided detailed explanations about Indigenous Social Security Systems.

- It is also worth highlighting that local Government stakeholders had well-articulated the concept of Indigenous Social Security Systems as compared to the National stakeholders.
Theme two - Incorporation of Indigenous Social Security Systems in policy-making: Out of all the respondents interviewed, only one had indicated that indigenous social security systems were currently being incorporated into policy formulation in Zambia.

The rest of the respondents noted that Indigenous social security systems were not incorporated into policy-making. These findings confirm that Government does not consider indigenous knowledge in policy development particularly Indigenous Social Security Systems.
Use of Indigenous Knowledge to respond to shocks and insecurities

Theme one: Knowledge/awareness of Indigenous Social Security Systems:

- Most ordinary respondents sampled at both the Local and National levels acknowledged that they were aware of various Indigenous Social Security Systems.

- Similarly, with the Governmental officials - most participants were able to provide various explanations on how they understood the former.
• **Theme two - Incorporation of ISSS in policy-making:** Generally all the respondents felt that Indigenous Social Security Systems were not incorporated in public policy-making.

• **Theme three - Utilisation of indigenous knowledge to deal with shocks and insecurities:** From the responses obtained, participants were able to acknowledge that Indigenous Social Security Systems were vital in circumstances where one was in need.
Conclusion

- It must be noted that the presented findings are not exhaustive as they are still being analysed and interpreted.

- This exercise will culminate in the proffering of recommendations, as was stated earlier in the objectives of the research study, to all relevant stakeholders.

- Already, there are interesting dimensions emerging from the findings which can serve as pointers for future policy-making endeavours in Zambia.

- The findings and conclusions of this research are expected to be written up in a book chapter which can then be disseminated to all relevant stakeholders in Zambia.


