

SOCIAL PROTECTION

Nature of Non-State Services

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A BANDAGE AND A CURE

Most non-State actors in social protection offer multiple services and do not specialise. The majority are small community-based organisations (CBOs) which respond flexibly to local needs.

Research in 30 different areas of six countries (Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda) show non-state social protection services include: mutual health insurance, welfare associations, burial groups, reunion of lost persons or war returnees, feeding programmes, food aid, cash transfers, humanitarian relief, family support services, child protection through orphanages, reception centres for gender-based violence victims and abandoned children, HIV testing, treatment and psychosocial services, micro credit schemes, savings and credit associations/groups, crop diversification and agricultural inputs, labour support, school fees supplements, skills training, childhood development, women's empowerment, advocacy and legal aid services.

Official policy and records categorise CBOs according to which of these services they deliver. They make no distinction on the "nature" of these services - whether they are protective, preventive, promotive or transformative.

Yet these distinctions, emphasised in the literature, have very real implications for the welfare and prospects of vulnerable people and profoundly influence policy making.

Protective services "come to the rescue" of vulnerable people when life shocks have plunged them into crisis.

Preventive services "reduce the risk" of life shocks and preempt negative coping strategies.

Promotive services "improve livelihoods" to help make the poor more self sufficient and resilient.

Transformative services "change cultures and social structures" to achieve equitable socio-economics as a whole.

If a life shock is compared to injuring a finger while operating machinery, protective services bandage the wound; preventive services teach people to operate the machine more carefully; promotive services enable people to buy safety gloves; and transformative services redesign the machine so it cannot cut fingers.

Studies in PASGR's six-country research initiative show that CBOs are the leading providers of protective and preventive services, and increasingly deliver promotive services (e.g. income-generating activities), but lack the scale and influence to be transformative.

The prime non-State channel for transformative action is through donors and NGOs, whose cultural knowledge is least complete and whose activism is politically sensitive and in some countries purposefully restricted.

POLICY CHALLENGE

All four main forms of social protection services are valid and necessary for determining strategies and priorities. But, the distinctions must be thoroughly understood in the design of policy objectives and individual projects.

Clearly, services which address the consequences of a problem, but not its cause, will be needed repetitively and even chronically. Services which build capacity and self-sufficiency not only meet

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immediate needs and reduce future risk but also contribute directly to overall socio-economic development.

There are yet other issues (e.g. ethnic clashes) which cannot be “solved” by project intervention (e.g. IDP camps) and require fundamental change in culture and socio-economic equality for long-term remedy.