



Social Protection and Universality: A Macro Perspective

Comments on Presentation by Hania Sholkamy

**ERF 28th Annual Conference
March 28, 2022**

What are the (current) hegemonies of social protection and what to do about them?

Fixation on technical fixes

Focus on individuals/households

occlusion of procedures

Static picture

Apolitical errors

Volatility problems

Technical Fixes

- Necessary but woefully insufficient as they cannot undo structural and political economy choices: *Therefore broader engagements are necessary so as to enable technical fixes to fix. (Example from Haya Karima approach to prioritizing interventions)*
- They enable the introduction of best-practices and lessons learnt: *but context and limitations must be part of this learning process. (the organic evolution of Oportunidades to Progresá to Prospera in Mexico) So avoid ceteris parabus spirit*
- These fixes are maximalist in spirit and can be modest in outcomes: *One master program will not fix many goals.*

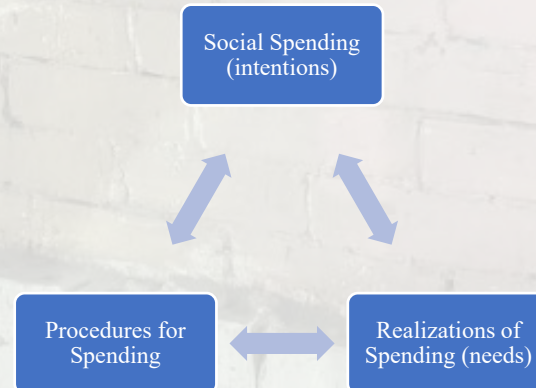
Individuals have occluded communities and collective benefits

Poverty targeting uses community and geographical indicators but benefits and transfers are given to individual households to the detriment of community based welfare. Infrastructure interventions and services serve more than targeted individuals. Interventions that optimize community or group based resilience are under-theorized or promoted. (Saving schemes are an example of such interventions but measurements of welfare do not capture these ties that bind and protect)

PROCESS

The term administrative capacity needs to be unpacked and placed firmly in the ways decisions are made and the channels of accountability, adaptation, and information sharing are availed. A distinction between the arrangements whereby social protection is provided and the outcomes or 'realizations' of these provisions would help this process of planning for the future.

These three components, intentions, procedures, and effects, are distinct but related aspects of social protection.



3 recurrent problems (Policy Myopia)

- **Reporting and hoping for outcomes but framing them as static ones without implicational meaning** (effects of cash transfers on wages, political costs of state interventions, elite captures, inflationary pressures)
- **Inclusion and exclusion errors becoming statistical rather than political issues**
- **Framing volatility and shocks as exceptional incidents. Focusing on their results not the ways to mitigate their outcomes.**

In conclusion

- The invitation to broaden the approach is welcome
- The presentation partially attempts to say how this can be done but less on what needs to change
- Financing social protection requires resources and sustainable fiscal tools but also requires reframing social protection as a 'productive' expenditure by incorporating welfare outcomes over the life-cycle as revenues
- Universality needs to be highlighted as a potential right and not as a targeting approach