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MADAGASCAR SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19: WHAT LESSONS TO LEARN?

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ABSTRACT

In Madagascar like elsewhere, there is still a lack of hindsight and precise data to establish a rigorous observation of the economic, social and health consequences of the Covid-19 crisis. After 12 months of social distancing measures (partial and total lockdown measures started on March 2020, only to be released on April 2021), the social situation is extremely tense and economic activities are slowing down. In the absence of an inclusive social protection, the disruption of economic activities linked to the government's social distancing measures has left people in need. The response of emergency assistance measures, if it proved to be necessary to maintain social order, does not meet the needs of the population. In a logic of risk and disaster management, it appears that the more the preventive mechanisms cover a large part of the population with high levels of social rights, the less the emergency measures are necessary. However, the simple reproduction of programs developed in other socio-economic contexts cannot appropriately operate over time due to a strong dependence on international aid, a mismatch in employment structures and a mismatch in national policy and the reality. to the existing institutional structures in Madagascar. The covid-19 crisis could be an opportunity for low income and international aid dependent countries like Madagascar, to design, context specific, innovative and integrating social protection.

KEYWORDS: Covid 19, Resilience, Social Protection, Disaster Risk Management

1. INTRODUCTION

In Madagascar like in many countries, there is still a lack of comprehensive and reliable data to establish a rigorous assessment of the economic, social and health impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. After a 12-month period of social distancing measures (lockdown started on March 24, 2020, to be released on April 19, 2020), the social situation is extremely tense. Only strategic activities continued with time limitations. The contraction in income is sudden for a large number of households, especially for households depending on informal employment and this constitutes a significant part of the population :9 out of 10 jobs are informal in Madagascar according to the National Statistical Institute employment survey. (INSTAT, 2012). The social consequences are all the more serious as Madagascar is characterized by an already high poverty rate before the crisis (73.7%, UNDP 2018), leaving little response capacity to the populations.

The issue of social protection, at the headlines of the news during the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, finds its place entirely in the current debate, both in ethical terms (social protection contributes to the efforts aiming at decreasing vulnerability and inequalities and alleviating poverty) and in economic ones (effective social protection is direct support to the economy by stimulating consumption and by strengthening human capital that it allows). With social protection, the moral imperative to protect and strengthen the social rights of the population joins the issue of strengthening human capital in the service of a more dynamic economy.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

On the basis of an important literature review, this article proposes to contribute to the necessary collective reflection to conceive a model of social protection "made in Madagascar", meaning adapted to the specific needs of the population of a country considered as one of the poorest in the world (multidimensional poverty, informal employment, isolation, rurality), subject to multiple risks and to the characteristics of Malagasy institutions. More specifically, the article helps to lay the foundations for a reflection on the role of adaptive social protection which would contribute to go beyond emergency measures and to develop an effective plan to manage social risks by increasing the national capacity of mitigating risks (preventive aspects) and to coping with shocks (curative aspects).

3. RESULTS

In the absence of strong protection, the disruption or reduction of economic activities caused by government social distancing measures has left the population destitute. The response of emergency assistance measures, if it has proved to be necessary to maintain social order, does not make it possible to meet the needs of the population. The simple reproduction of programs developed in other socio-economic

contexts cannot appropriately operate over time due to heavy dependence on international aid, inadequate employment structures and inadequate existing institutional structures in Madagascar.

4. DISCUSSIONS

4.1 The covid-19 crisis in Madagascar, a dramatic indicator of the lack of an effective social protection policy and system to meet population's needs

The social measures put in place by the government are mainly composed of emergency measures (essentially, distribution of food to the most affected people, accompanied later by a distribution of money of 100,000 Ar¹) and do not succeed. contain the general impoverishment of the population of the cities affected by the lockdown. Private initiatives were observed and fundraising from individuals and the private sector has been organized. However, a majority of the population remains excluded from these measures and the rural population feels completely excluded from the "social emergency plan". Since the beginning of the crisis, decapitalization behaviors were noticeable in particular through the decapitalization of capital goods (bicycle, TV, radio, etc.). The poorest households, in the absence of savings and capital, adopt behaviors of contraction in their consumption, reinforcing the risks of undernutrition, which are already high (around 31% of households were food insecure at the national level: i.e. 33% of households in rural areas and 18.7% in the capital and large urban centers, (National Nutrition Office,2021). It is also widely agreed that, following a major economic shock, informal safety nets collapse and, where they exist, public aid programs are often insufficient or inappropriate in the context of a serious country-wide crisis. Thus the covid-19 crisis is a clear revelation of the absence, of effective and adapted social protection policy in Madagascar.

The adaptive social protection framework (Davies et al. 2009), an integrated approach supported by various technical and financial partners, to strengthen household resilience appears to be particularly suited to dealing with the capacity of social protection to face the Covid-19 crisis in Madagascar. However, the simple reproduction of programs developed in other socio-economic contexts (whether social protection systems set up in formerly industrialized countries or those in emerging countries) cannot appropriately operate over time because of heavy dependence on international aid, inadequate employment structures and inadequate existing institutional structures in Madagascar. The covid-19 crisis could be an opportunity for low income and international aid dependent countries like Madagascar, to design, context specific, innovative and integrating social protection. An analysis of the history of social protection indeed shows that decisive advances in terms of social protection are generally linked to the occurrence of key events, leading to a collective awareness of the needs of national solidarity to ensure

¹ USD 26 approximately.

social rights (end of apartheid in South Africa, second world war in Europe). The current crisis could create such a window of opportunity.

4.2 Adaptive Social Protection: Preventing Risks and Responding to Shocks to Build Resilience

Adaptive social protection arose out of the effort to integrate actions in terms of social protection, disaster risk management and climate change (Davies et al. 2009). It is a multisectoral approach, developed by technical and financial partners, and aimed at strengthening the resilience of people and countries in the context of climate change and increasing risks and shocks (Ulrich and Slater, 2016). It can be compared to the reactive protection to shocks offered by the World Food Program (Beazley and Solórzano, 2017) as they both take into account the deeply dynamic nature of living conditions. These operational approaches follow in the wake of a body of scientific work on the dynamics of living conditions, developed since the end of the 1990s, in different conceptual frameworks, such as dynamic approaches to poverty, transitory poverty and poverty. chronic (Jalan and Ravallion, 1998; Hulme and Shepherd, 2003; CPRC, 2004 and 2008; Dercon, 2005), approaches to poverty traps (Carter and Barret, 2013; Barret and Carter, 2016), approaches to vulnerability (Chambers, 1989; Moser, 1998) and livelihood resilience (Quandt, 2018), and which are summarized in Figure 1.

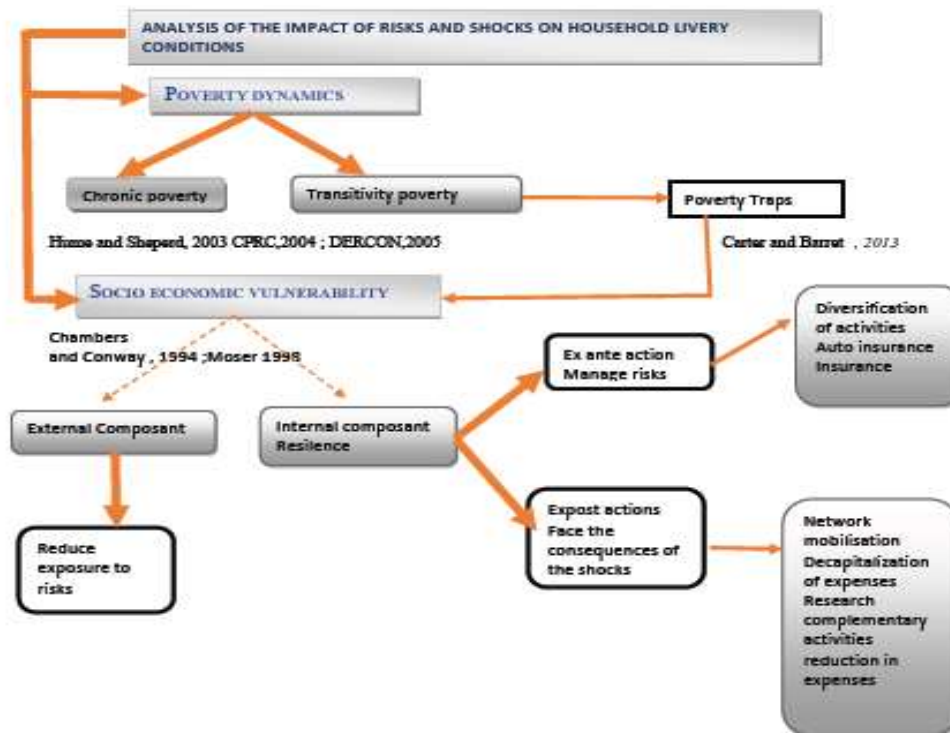


Figure 1. Analysis of the impact of risks and shocks on household living conditions

Source: Authors 2020

According to Lallau (2017), there are many definitions of resilience circulating in the world of aid and emergency. They generally emphasize the ability to bounce back from a shock, but also to prepare for it or even avoid it, and to adapt one's livelihoods sustainably to changing risk factors. Thus, Ulrich and Slater (2016), following Bahadur et al. (2015) retain three sets of capacities likely to increase resilience: (i) absorption capacities (absorptive capacities) allow, ex-post and in the short term, to reduce the negative impact of the shock on the means of existence and living conditions; (ii) Anticipatory capacities make it possible to reduce ex-ante exposure to risks; (iii) transformative capacities can be observed in the adaptation capacities of livelihoods in the medium or long term.

Social protection is thus likely to strengthen people's resilience by increasing their absorption, anticipation and transformation capacities. Figure 2 shows how suitable social protection mechanisms can support the risk management cycle

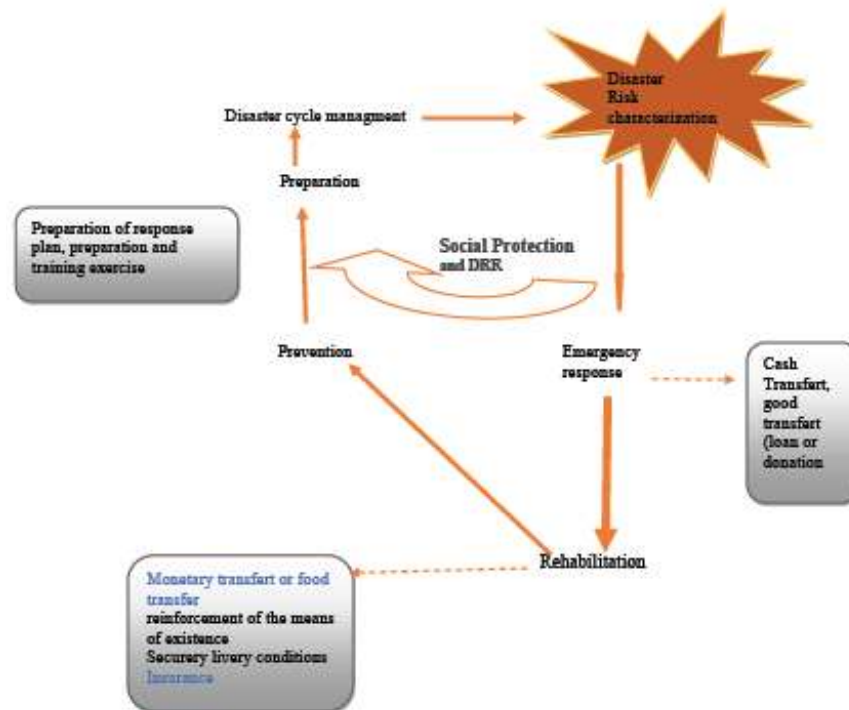


Figure 2. Contribution of Social protection to strengthen the risk and disaster management cycle
Source: Authors 2020

Given the circular nature of the risk management cycle, it is clear that the more the prevention mechanisms are anchored and adapted, the more the importance of emergency responses is decreasing. The current situation in Madagascar, as in many developing countries, shows the massive use of transfer and assistance programs to deal with the covid-19 crisis (Gentilini et al., 2020). In this, they are indicative of the absence of preventive social protection mechanisms. The development of effective social protection for health and work would thus make it possible to reduce the weight of emergency measures and the dependence on transfers and international aid which is characteristic of formal Malagasy social protection.

4.3 What social protection for Madagascar? a few lines of thought for improving the social protection policy and its implementation strategy

The social protection system in Madagascar is particularly fragmented; it consists of a social insurance system for employees in the formal sector, combined with assistance programs targeting the poorest (conditional transfers), an embryo of universal health coverage and mutual insurance systems or private. The current system therefore gives pride of place to informal social protection systems which are structured by relationships of dependence and private solidarity, embedded in a social structure grappling with a dynamic of change (lineage and family structures) (Gondard-Delcroix et al. al. 2019). Formal social protection remains importantly dependent on conceptions of social protection forged in arenas other than the national arena and its funding relies largely on international aid (Berrou et al. 2019). Finally, the Malagasy social protection system only meets very partially the needs of the populations (Gondard-Delcroix et al. 2019) and the coverage rate is particularly low, around 5.7% of the population according to the Aspire data base (social assistance and insurance).

The context of the current crisis could be an important opportunity to rise decision makers' awareness of the need to redesign the Malagasy social protection system. It would be therefore, possible to focus on essential questions to contribute to the national debate and reflections.

- I. Appropriate social protection at the national level: according to the work of Hickey and Bukenya (2016) on the political economy of social protection, African social protection systems, strongly influenced by them, evolve differently from one country to another in different countries. taken with national events, the national political game and the balance of power of actors. If in Madagascar, the nation-wide debate in terms of social protection still remains fairly confidential, this seems a necessary step to build appropriate social protection at the national level, that is to say forged in a broad social dialogue.
- II. Sustainable social protection is based on sustainable national resources, the reflection on possible sources of financing, initiated within the framework of universal health coverage or the expansion

of cash transfer programs which is one of the components of the Madagascar Emergence plan), requires to answer a number of questions:

- a. To Funding according to a contributory insurance-type model: what is the capacity and willingness of households and businesses to contribute? compulsory or voluntary system; with the risk if the system is voluntary that only people at risk and / or the least poor contribute and are thus covered?
 - b. Funding through taxes and levies: dedicated funding or not, with the risk if the funding is not dedicated that it is carried over to other issues deemed more important depending on national policy and events?
- III. Universal social protection or targeting the poorest? According to Merrien (2013), two major visions of social protection co-exist on the international scene: a vision in terms of efficiency, the preferred tool of which is a system of transfers targeted at the most vulnerable populations (World Bank as an actor -key), and another based on a logic in terms of social rights, based on mechanisms aimed at universality of access to social rights (DFID and UNDP as key players).
- IV. How can the formal social protection system be linked to the pre-existing informal systems at the level of municipalities, fokontany, families or lineages? Stavropoulou et al. (2017), following Verpoorten and Verschraegen (2010) indeed insist that decentralized social protection systems, based on community forms of social protection would be a solution more suited to the characteristics of sub-Saharan African countries. In addition, effective ownership of social protection systems can only happen as close as possible to the populations themselves. Olivier de Sardan (2014) has thus underlined, within the framework of a study on monetary transfers in Niger, the capacity of "recycling" in the local systems of the practices and standards brought by aid, locally considered as illegitimate because not intelligible, generating a set of "unexpected effects" during project design and which may lead to their invalidation (Olivier de Sardan and Picolli, 2018). Taking these local social systems into account could thus contribute to inventing "vita Malagasy" social protection mechanisms adapted to local social contexts and thus promote their understanding, their appropriation and, consequently, their sustainability.

5. CONCLUSION

The Covid-19 crisis is a powerful indicator of the need for effective social protection in Madagascar. Fragmented, divided, underdeveloped, Malagasy social protection is far from covering the needs of the populations and leaves the population with very low resilience level to shocks. In the absence of social protection at work, the interruption or reduction of economic activities due to social distancing measures taken by the government, has left people destitute. The response of emergency assistance measures, while

it has proved necessary to maintain social order, does not meet the needs of the population. From a disaster risk management perspective, it is clear that the more preventive mechanisms cover a large part of the population with high levels of social rights, the more the importance of emergency measures decreases. The Covid-19 crisis could be an opportunity to shift from an ex-post emergency-oriented approach to an ex-ante social protection logic. However, the format of this social protection must be designed as to effectively cover the social challenges and Malagasy institutions context. Without providing a definitive answer, the article contributes to the national debate by highlighting 4 central points: (i) ownership within the framework of the national debate; (ii) the issue of financing, an advocacy to sustainable social protection; (iii) the fundamental orientation sought: targeting the poorest or a universal approach, in terms of satisfaction of social rights for all; (iv) ownership by the populations and the articulation between formal social protection and informal social protection.

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