

IDS Bulletin

Transforming Development Knowledge

Volume 55 | Number 2 | October 2024

REIMAGINING SOCIAL PROTECTION

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Introduction: Social Protection in a Time of Global Uncertainty¹

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Abstract Social protection has established itself as a vibrant policy sector across the global South, and as a pillar of international development cooperation. Social protection features in numerous country policies and development agency strategies, as well as in several Sustainable Development Goals. However, the global context today is characterised by a range of emerging and intensifying challenges and uncertainties, including post-Covid-19 pandemic recovery; the cost-of-living crisis; unprecedented climate change; and rising numbers of protracted wars and political instability, leading to mass displacement and migration. What is the role of social protection in this shifting and uncertain global context? This article highlights challenges and opportunities for social protection at this crossroads moment, under the themes of politics, crises, innovation, and inclusion, as a way of introducing and framing the contributions to this *IDS Bulletin*. We argue that the need for social protection has never been greater, but its future trajectories need urgent reimagining.

Keywords social protection, uncertainty, politics, crises, innovation, inclusion.

1 Social protection at a crossroads

Forms of social assistance and risk management to support vulnerable people have existed for centuries in all countries. However, 'social protection' as an expanded form of safety net that comprises social transfers (primarily cash) as the main instrument, often supported by international development agencies, has become an established social policy sector across the global South in just two decades since the early 2000s. Social protection appeared in several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. Even the poorest countries now have a National Social Protection Policy, although many of these were conceived

© 2024 The Authors. *IDS Bulletin* © Institute of Development Studies | DOI: 10.19088/1968-2024.117



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The *IDS Bulletin* is published by Institute of Development Studies, Library Road, Brighton, BN1 9RE, UK. This article is part of *IDS Bulletin* Vol. 55 No. 2 October 2024 'Reimagining Social Protection'.

and drafted with technical assistance from development partners. More recently, social protection provided an invaluable set of instruments deployed by governments worldwide in national responses to the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, the global context today is very different compared with two decades ago. While huge strides have been made in poverty alleviation, economic growth, and the expansion of social services including social protection, there has been a significant increase in the scale and range of emerging and intensifying uncertainties and challenges. Dimensions of uncertainty are multifaceted and often interconnected. In recent years, the world has experienced the consequences of devastating wars in Ukraine, Gaza, Yemen, and Sudan, alongside rising food and energy prices. This occurred against the backdrop of post-pandemic recovery and efforts to get back on track towards achieving the SDG targets by 2030; the intensifying climate crisis and sluggish transitions to green economies; and the increasing number and duration of protracted crises, associated with armed conflict, displacement, and rising migration.

Moreover, despite the global expansion of social protection, questions remain about the extent to which it is fully institutionalised and embedded, especially in low-income countries where the initial impetus and funding were provided by international development partners. This concern is reflected in persistent underfunding by governments in the global South of social protection programmes: under-coverage, inadequate benefits, and few claims-based entitlements. While the pandemic led to a large increase in scale and coverage of interventions, financed from national and international resources, many have been discontinued, and the wave of optimism about sustainable expansion of social protection post-pandemic seems to have fizzled out.

This leads to critical questions about the role and shape of social protection, at this time of global uncertainty. What will remain if financial and technical assistance from development agencies is reduced or withdrawn? Related to this, the rise of right-of-centre populist governments, economic shocks associated with the pandemic, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Gaza wars, and austerity budgets in the global North all threaten to reduce official development assistance to the global South, which in turn could affect spending on social protection. Furthermore, in this year, 2024, over half the world's population in 80-plus countries are being asked to vote, with multiple changes in government likely that could either strengthen or undermine social protection systems in those countries. Limited financial resources could have knock-on effects on efforts to innovate social protection and make schemes more inclusive, halting, or potentially reversing, progress made in the past. All these uncertainties are relevant to how to think about social protection for the future: will social

protection continue to expand in scope and remit, or will there be stagnation in the face of multiplying crises, financing strains, and wavering political commitment?

Importantly, uncertainties also present opportunities. A defining function of social protection is to protect vulnerable people against risks and shocks. New technologies and common modalities and platforms are facilitating a convergence between social protection and humanitarian relief, as was amply demonstrated during the pandemic. In addition to digital innovations in design and delivery, novel ways of combining interventions and building cross-sectoral linkages aim to create more effective systems approaches, such as the development of unified registries for more effective and inclusive targeting. Can such opportunities be harnessed at a time of uncertainty, when they are arguably most needed?

Drawing key insights and lessons from an international conference on 'Reimagining Social Protection in a Time of Global Uncertainty', hosted by the Institute of Development Studies in September 2023, the articles in this issue of the *IDS Bulletin* reflect on the role of social protection in this volatile global context. In particular, we focus on three broad themes that are increasingly defining the trajectory of social protection policy, programming, and research. These are as follows.

The politics of social protection policy processes

The contemporary wave of social protection has been criticised for failing to engage with broader social policy and development discourses, having been conceptualised, designed, and financed in much of the global South by development agencies with often contradictory ideological positions, and limited toolkits of preferred interventions. Now that social protection is firmly on the agenda in most low- and middle-income countries, how can international actors best support governments and local civil society to take ownership and move towards nationally chosen and locally appropriate social protection systems, within holistic social policy frameworks?

Social protection in crisis settings

Protracted crisis settings are increasingly common, involving multiple compounding crises, such as conflict, displacement, climate shocks and stresses, and institutional fragility. The damage and disruptions to institutional capacity to deliver social protection, and on political and social contracts, due to acute crises, raises many questions about the suitability of social protection as a response to emergency situations. Key considerations in these contexts are the relationships between different providers and public authorities in delivering social protection (humanitarian, armed groups, donors, central and subnational government) and whether hybrid or alternative providers are better suited to serving the most vulnerable.

Inclusive and innovative social protection

Times of uncertainty and crisis give rise to new needs and lead to new vulnerabilities. They can also reinforce existing patterns of marginalisation and bring new forms of exclusion along various sociodemographic dimensions, including gender, disability, age, and ethnicity. Innovations in the design, implementation, and evaluation of social protection have enabled its rapid expansion and can facilitate access to previously unserved or underserved populations as well as those in need. Yet a focus on expanding coverage towards these groups should not be at the expense of adequate provision, programme effectiveness, or respectful implementation. Of key concern is how social protection can be inclusive of and sensitive to persistent and newly emerging vulnerabilities.

The following sections expand further on these three themes and introduce, by theme, each of the articles included in this *IDS Bulletin*.

2 Politics

The rapid spread of social protection as a policy agenda throughout the global South has been the subject of increasing scrutiny in recent years (Kuhlmann and Nullmeier 2022). The introduction of social protection programmes – especially conditional or unconditional cash transfers – by dozens of governments in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia did not just happen, it was a co-constructed process of social policy diffusion (Leisering 2018). Understanding this policy process requires turning the spotlight onto the stakeholders and interests involved, at national and transnational levels. For example, even if social protection is not significant in deciding elections, it can be used for political legitimacy and regime survival (Seekings 2019).

Early drivers of the social protection agenda in the 1990s included food insecurity and famines, structural adjustment reforms, HIV and AIDS, and conflict, which all increased the need for social assistance or humanitarian relief. However, in numerous low-income countries, the adoption or expansion of social protection was often led by international organisations rather than domestic politics – it was donor driven, not nationally owned. Many governments and political elites were ambivalent or reluctant (and some still are), especially about cash 'handouts' to large numbers of citizens. They favoured a developmental rather than welfarist approach, citing fears of creating dependency and fiscal unaffordability as constraints on setting up social protection systems. Models that resonated with these views – such as Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) that has been dominated by public works since its launch in 2005, with cash or food transfers as a residual component – were more likely to be adopted and scaled up by governments.

International organisations – United Nations agencies, bilateral donors, international financial institutions – deployed several strategies to circumvent opposition, including forming policy coalitions with local champions, and building the evidence base for positive impacts (Lavers and Hickey 2016; Devereux 2023). Governments were presented with evidence of three developmental pathways: economic multipliers (through spending and investment of cash transfers), building human capital (linkages to social services), and support to livelihoods (productive safety nets and graduation programmes). The negotiating strength of international organisations, especially in low-income, aid-dependent countries, was underpinned by their soft power of financial and technical assistance.

Agencies such as the World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) generally supported developmental objectives, while other agencies led by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) saw social protection as a rights-based guarantee of basic income security for all. These divergent visions bred tensions between international actors and resulted in conflicting advice to governments. This tension continues to pervade social protection thinking and programming. In their contribution to this *IDS Bulletin*, 'Social Protection: Aspirations and Limitations of an Expanding Agenda', Devereux and Wolkenhauer ask: is social protection primarily a social safety net, or a poverty reduction instrument? Instead of seeing livelihood protection and livelihood promotion as competing objectives, the authors argue for 'social protection plus' approaches that integrate social protection within wider developmental visions and strategies.

Institutionalised social protection systems need to be underpinned by legal frameworks that set out the state's responsibilities to deliver rights that citizens are entitled to claim. In their contribution, Ogharanduku, Kujiyat-Iliyasu and Isa (this *IDS Bulletin*) examine the process of 'Enacting Social Protection Laws in Jigawa and Zamfara States, Nigeria', by analysing the roles of external and internal actors. The impetus behind these laws came from a donor agency, the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), through a pilot project called 'Expanding Social Protection for Inclusive Development', implemented by two international non-governmental organisations, Save the Children International and Action against Hunger.

The strategies deployed by these organisations, discussed by the authors, are familiar from the policy diffusion literature: advocacy, stakeholder engagement, identifying champions, capacity building, systems strengthening, and evidence generation. These activities were financed and driven by the external members of the transnational policy coalition, with the objective of maximising inclusiveness and 'reducing resistance' by local actors

(Ogharanduku *et al.*, this *IDS Bulletin*: 35). Ultimately, this led to the successful enactment of laws in both Nigerian states, signifying a depth of commitment to social protection which will be difficult to reverse.

One approach that links social protection to complementary objectives is 'shock-sensitive social protection' (SSSP), which builds the resilience of vulnerable households against covariate or collective shocks, using shock-responsive mechanisms such as scalability, contingency financing, and electronic payments. SSSP also builds broad policy coalitions, drawing on national and international actors engaged in disaster risk management and humanitarian relief.

In 'The Political Economy of Shock-Responsive Social Protection: Analysis from Malawi', Archibald (this *IDS Bulletin*) finds that SSSP was promoted in Malawi by international actors, using their technical and financial leverage. A key insight of political settlements is that policy choices are not based purely on technical considerations but reflect the mandates and ideological preferences of the range of stakeholders involved, as well as power relations between them. Archibald finds that SSSP has not become embedded in national policy discourse. Moreover, fragility within the international policy coalition is threatening both the institutionalisation of SSSP and the expansion of routine social protection in Malawi, which remains limited and overwhelmingly donor funded.

Finally, Seekings' contribution to this section, 'The Future Politics of Social Protection in Africa' (this *IDS Bulletin*), argues that whether the rapid expansion of social protection continues depends on a range of endogenous forces – will enthusiasm and financing from international organisations persist? How will domestic politics evolve in each country? – as well as exogenous forces: implications of demographic shifts such as ageing and urbanising populations, and unforeseeable climate, conflict, and health shocks.

Seekings is pessimistic, concluding that 'considerable political obstacles to the further expansion of social protection will persist' (Seekings, this *IDS Bulletin*: 57). He cites as evidence the failure of the Covid-19 pandemic to trigger lasting reforms to social protection in most countries, and the fact that social protection has rarely been a politically significant issue in national elections in Africa. Even if endogenous and exogenous forces increase the need for government interventions, social protection is not necessarily the first choice of politicians unless the costs are underwritten by international organisations. But the international community is scaling back its spending while it tries to persuade governments to take over the financing of social protection. The next few years could therefore present the first real test of

how institutionalised in domestic policies and politics the social protection agenda actually is.

3 Crises

States and the international humanitarian community face the need to respond to accelerating crises characterised by increased complexity, with interacting causes and consequences (conflict, climate change, poverty, displacement), over short and protracted time frames. Pertinent questions include the following: How do social protection systems and programmes adjust to acute shocks? To what extent and in which ways can social protection strengthen livelihoods and resilience in fragile and conflict-affected settings? And what is the relationship between different providers and public authorities in delivering social assistance in crisis settings, ranging from international agencies to central and subnational governments, to non-state stakeholders such as religious groups, political movements, and armed groups?

Current approaches to helping people manage and survive in crises seek to align social provision (primarily state-led responses to chronic poverty) with humanitarian support for populations confronting acute shocks. The policy ideal motivating this approach is a shock-responsive social protection (SRSP) system that joins reactive assistance with routine, predictable, long-term support (O'Brien *et al.* 2018). As Lind and Sabates-Wheeler explain in their article 'Social Protection in Conflict and Conflict-Related Displacement Crises' (this *IDS Bulletin*), while the SRSP agenda is an important one, it primarily applies in settings where a social protection system, or at least key elements of one, already exist.

Comparatively, there has been less attention in the social protection sector to situations of conflict, fragility, and displacement. The provision of social assistance in these settings, however, typically sits outside the SRSP system because emergencies are defined in relation to whether the social protection system is able (or not) to respond to the crisis (Sabates-Wheeler *et al.* 2022). Lind and Sabates-Wheeler detail a range of impediments to provision through social protection channels in conflict settings, including the destruction of implementing infrastructure, ongoing insecurity, the lack of administrative capacities, the association of social assistance with parties in a conflict, highly politicised decision-making, and high operational costs.

The nexus between state and non-state social protection will vary across crisis settings depending on the maturity of the social protection system, as well as the dynamics of crises themselves, and relations amongst key stakeholders (Winder Rossi *et al.* 2017). In a politically stable crisis where state legitimacy is broadly accepted, there will be scope for state-provided social provision, yet capacity may be undermined so there is still room for

alternative providers to support. In 'Realigning Social Protection Across the Nexus: Reflections from Protracted Crises in the Arab Region', Reid and colleagues (this *IDS Bulletin*) review crisis settings in the Middle East to highlight experiences and lessons in applying the international social security standards (ISSS) in furthering state-led social protection. For example, in Jordan and Iraq, the normative lens of the ISSS focusing on the individual right to social security has helped to orient the efforts of international agencies and funders in finding ways to strengthen state social protection systems.

In a situation where conflict risks remain and the functioning of state structures is severely compromised, provision will often be reactive to still-evolving needs, short term as conditions are still fluid, and usually coordinated and delivered through humanitarian agencies. Armed groups themselves may also take up the mantle of social provision, not least to seek favour with civilian populations. In these settings, it is proposed that the move to long-term social assistance could strengthen relations between states and citizens. In 'Can Social Assistance Strengthen the Social Contract in Somalia?', Lawson-McDowall and Khan (this *IDS Bulletin*) explain that while such thinking infiltrates arguments for moves to multi-year social assistance programmes, three 'bargains' in Somalia's political and security landscape undermine these hopes. These include bargains, or negotiations, in and amongst clans; those between the militant group Al-Shabaab and populations in areas under its control; and those involving the federal government of Somalia and international donors. The political economy of aid to Somalia, defined through these three sets of relationships, complicates any clear benefits for a notional 'social contract'.

Another example comes from Myanmar. In 'Humanitarian Activism, Social Protection, and Emergent Citizenship in Myanmar', Aung Naing (this *IDS Bulletin*) explains that the junta-led government is not simply incapable of providing social protection but is directly implicated in the creation of conditions of precarity and performs actions to deliberately obstruct aid and welfare provision. These conditions challenge any 'state-centric' model of welfare and require us to think about emergent welfare and state-building from the bottom up and situated across multiple sites and actors. Aung Naing's account of how localised welfare is formed and provided by a range of emergent alternative, non-state providers, points to the possibilities for state-building to emerge from locally provided sources.

There are specific challenges associated with the provision of social assistance to displaced populations. As Lind and Sabates-Wheeler detail in their article, these include access barriers, ambiguous rights in relation to the state, lack of portability of transfers, and difficulties in coordination and the interoperability of systems. Who provides and delivers social

protection, how, and on what terms, will depend on whether the crisis is active, whether the displaced population is dispersed or area-defined within a camp, and whether the host government recognises the rights of displaced groups. In 'Linking Social Protection and Humanitarian Systems to Respond to Forced Displacement', Lowe and Hagen-Zanker (this *IDS Bulletin*) detail the challenges of linking social protection with humanitarian assistance for displaced peoples, drawing on comparative analysis of approaches in Cameroon, Colombia, and Greece. Among other suggestions, they recommend specific modifications to the design and delivery of social protection so that displaced populations are served effectively and equitably. Consideration and response to how assistance to displaced groups is experienced and perceived by the host population is significant. International and national commitment to the protection of refugees and associated financing remains a priority concern.

In their article, Reid and colleagues explain that there is variable progress across countries in the Middle East in supporting refugee populations through social protection channels. Whereas in Lebanon, the government has resisted any attempts to incorporate refugees into the country's social protection system, in Jordan, social insurance is guaranteed to refugees. Even with enabling legislation in place, however, barriers remain for refugees, since many work in the informal sector and are not registered with the state Social Security Corporation.

Ultimately, it is important that humanitarian responses in conflict and post-conflict settings do not exacerbate existing inequalities or inadvertently worsen social tensions. At the same time, social protection actors must understand how their interventions interact with the dynamics of crisis settings. Conflict-sensitive social protection will incorporate into its design, targeting, and delivery a systematic understanding of its interaction with the local context to minimise harm, ensure that conflict-affected populations can access the programme as intended, and, where possible, promote peace-building and social cohesion (Birch *et al.* 2023).

4 Inclusion and innovation

In 2011, when the *IDS Bulletin* titled 'Social Protection for Social Justice' was published (Devereux *et al.* 2011), the area of 'sensitive' social protection was in its exploratory stages. Contributions at that time were tightly focused on articulating the practical and strategic needs of vulnerable groups, such as women, children, people affected by HIV and AIDS, and persons with disabilities (Roelen 2011). Discussions centred on how social protection design and implementation could be adapted to cater to the needs of vulnerable groups, as well as on how to gain political traction to ensure that those needs were visible and addressed. As findings from social assistance pilots became more widely available, acknowledgement started to build that cash alone is powerful

but has limited ability to address complex needs or intersecting vulnerabilities (Davis *et al.* 2016).

Since then, the social protection field has witnessed a shift away from narrowly targeted safety nets to more ambitious and transformative holistic programming that seeks to be inclusive and responsive to differentiated needs. We now know a lot more about the impact of different modalities, and how they might lead to positive outcomes in some areas but less so in others (see, for example, Little *et al.* 2021). The notion of 'sensitive' social protection has in part been replaced with 'inclusive' programming, in recognition of intersecting inequalities and markers of exclusion. There is also increased recognition that uncertainty and crisis can lead to new vulnerabilities or compound existing patterns of exclusion (Sabates-Wheeler *et al.* 2022), including by disability, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. Finally, discussions have moved from recognising the need for greater sensitivity and inclusion to questions of how to put this into practice, in terms of both design and implementation.

Developments in the field of social protection are also characterised by a continuous search for innovation and promising models to make social protection more effective and efficient. Over the years, such efforts have increasingly tapped into opportunities afforded by new technologies (Lowe 2022). From the use of mobile phones to pay cash transfers to the deployment of drones for geographical targeting, new technologies and digitisation have become integral to social protection. Beyond technology, novel ways of combining interventions and building cross-sectoral linkages aim to create more effective systems approaches, such as the development of single registries.

Innovation is often framed as being the enabler of inclusion: innovation can make it possible – from technical and cost perspectives – to expand and scale interventions to previously unserved or underserved populations. On the flipside, however, there are the exclusionary risks of developing and relying on single registries for identifying beneficiaries, using digital technology for paying beneficiaries, and prioritising scalable models over contextualised support (see, for example, Faith 2023). Large amounts of data generated through the adoption of such technologies can also give way to state surveillance, thereby undermining digital rights and civil liberties (Roberts 2021). Striking a balance between capitalising on technical affordances and their exclusionary risks is a challenge many schemes are grappling with.

This section of the *IDS Bulletin* includes four articles that are reflective of these ongoing trends.

The contribution 'Beyond Design: Examining the Implementation of Gender-Responsive Social Protection in Ethiopia' by Kuss and

of Hällström (this *IDS Bulletin*) illustrates the shift from recognising the need to be gender-responsive to putting such recognition into action. Using the PSNP in Ethiopia as a case study, they argue that while schemes might be gender-responsive in design, implementation shortcomings mean that gender provisions fall short in practice. Limited financial resources, coordination challenges, lack of capacity and expertise, and high turnover represent some of the challenges undermining the translation of well-considered design into real outcomes for women.

In 'Indigenous Peoples and Social Protection: The Case of the Peruvian Amazon', Correa Aste (this *IDS Bulletin*) offers a critical interrogation of the extent to which indigenous populations have been included or have benefited from the region's expansion of social protection. Reflecting on policy examples from Colombia and Peru, Correa Aste argues that despite countries' intercultural agendas or so-called 'differential approaches', social protection does not adequately account for social and cultural specificities of indigenous peoples. Experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic are illustrative and emblematic of how interventions were exclusionary by taking inadequate account of remote living conditions, lack of public services, and poor infrastructure.

In 'Cellfare: Delivering Self-Targeted Social Protection Using Mobile Phones', Berg, Rajasekhar and Manjula (this *IDS Bulletin*) present an innovative prototype for making public works more dignified and more cost-efficient by replacing physical labour with digital micro-tasks using mobile phones. Somewhat paradoxically, the scheme is set up to be both self-targeted, by making tasks repetitive and their performance relatively low paid, and more inclusive, by making activities more accessible to those less able to undertake physically strenuous tasks. Findings from a small-scale pilot in India suggest that participants who also have experience with the country's National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme are relatively positive about this form of digital workfare.

Finally, in 'Exploring Synergies Between Community Mobilisation and Cash Transfers in Bangladesh', Aktar, Roelen and Ton (this *IDS Bulletin*) present findings from a 'cash plus' intervention that is both inclusive and innovative, not from a technological perspective but by taking a radical relational approach. Analysis of community mobilisers' fieldwork reports shows that by providing a combination of unconditional cash transfers with emergent and needs-based relational community support to all residents of a low-income neighbourhood in Dhaka, households are able to address needs they themselves identify as most pressing in ways they consider most suitable and appropriate.

5 Conclusions

Following more than two decades of remarkable expansion in policies, programmes, and research, the social protection

sector finds itself at a crossroads. Compounding shocks, from the pandemic to wars and political upheaval, have had global consequences, with poverty levels rising again in many places, and unprecedented levels of humanitarian need. Yet political commitment to social protection, which was variable and never guaranteed, has wavered.

Reflecting on the significant shifts and uncertainties in international and national politics, climate change and environmental disasters, and global financing for development and humanitarian emergencies, we (the co-editors) are holding our breaths as we both watch and contribute to the reshaping of social protection. Imagining the direction that social protection will take in the next five-plus years is a difficult task, given the myriad directions and forms in which social protection can evolve.

Nevertheless, our responsibility is to return to the core focus of the 2023 conference and of this collection of articles, by reimagining futures for social protection in a time of global uncertainty. Faced with the prospect of stagnation and unclear prospects, these articles demonstrate the need to reimagine the scope and ambition of social protection.

Firstly, the rapid diffusion of social protection programmes and policies throughout the global South during the last two decades, widely applauded as a success story of development cooperation, is in fact a job half done. It was relatively easy to introduce cash transfer programmes during the 'big push' period of seemingly unlimited donor resources and enthusiasm. The challenge for social protection advocates now is how to consolidate these gains, as resources and enthusiasm wane. Governments and civil society actors need to be supported to institutionalise social protection systems in national politics, such that the human right to protection in the face of inevitable shocks and life cycle contingencies becomes an irreversible social contract in all countries.

Secondly, as global humanitarian caseloads remain high, and the numbers of displaced populations expand, interest in how social protection can support responses beyond humanitarian assistance will continue to rise. While social protection stakeholders can and must consider design and implementation approaches that are best suited to the conditions of conflict settings, it is clear that social protection alone will not always be the most effective modality of intervention in these places. Working at the intersection of humanitarian and development sectors will be critical, as will encouragement of hybrid provision through usual and less-usual providers.

Finally, inclusion and innovation are hot topics within the social protection agenda, with far greater acknowledgement of the

need to be attentive to differential needs and an explosion of experimentation with technology and alternative approaches in the last 10–15 years. However, as the contributions in this *IDS Bulletin* show, it is now time to ensure that acknowledgements translate into meaningful action and tangible change for beneficiaries, especially those who are most vulnerable and marginalised. Innovation will be vital to these efforts. At the same time, it will be important to strike a balance between leveraging new technologies and doing things differently, to reach as many people as quickly and efficiently as possible and ensuring no one falls between the cracks, while at the same time safeguarding digital rights and civil liberties.

Notes

- 1 The contributions to this *IDS Bulletin* emerged from an international conference on 'Reimagining Social Protection in a Time of Global Uncertainty', organised by the Centre for Social Protection and hosted by the Institute of Development Studies in September 2023. The conference was generously funded by UK aid from the UK government through the Better Assistance in Crises (BASIC) Research programme, and by aid from the Irish government (Irish Aid). Publication of this *IDS Bulletin* was funded by the National Research Foundation of South Africa (grant number 98411).
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