The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR), a faith-based organization and a ministry of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), strives to translate into action Christian principles and values related to promoting social justice in Zambia. The quest to promote social justice is well captured in its vision and mission which says: “A Just Zambian society guided by faith, where everyone enjoys fullness of life; and from a faith inspired perspective the JCTR promotes justice for all in Zambia, especially for the poor, through research, education, advocacy and consultations respectively.”

In our JCTR’s 2018 Analysis of Specific Social Protection Vulnerability and Economic Policies and Laws in Relation to Basic Needs and Nutrition Basket (BNNB) and Cost of Living, Chanda Chileshe looks at Social protection as a tool to assist the poor and vulnerable fight the widespread poverty.

According to the International Labour Organisation, the term “Social Protection” is used to mean protection provided by social security systems in the case of social risks and needs. Social protection is often referred to as having a broader character than social security (including, in particular, protection provided between members of the family or members of a local community). It is also used in some contexts with a narrower meaning than social security (understood as comprising only measures addressed to the poorest, most vulnerable or excluded members of society). Thus, unfortunately, in many contexts the terms ‘Social Security’ and ‘Social Protection’ are used interchangeably.”

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Zambia’s national policy on social protection describes it as “Policies and practices that protect and promote the livelihoods and welfare of people suffering from critical levels of poverty and deprivation and/or are vulnerable to risks and shocks.”

Vulnerability is defined as susceptibility to the impact of risky events, as a result of particular weakness or lack of defences, and resulting in a worsened situation for the suffer(s). The long-term poor are clearly vulnerable (National Policy on Social Protection, 2014).

**Importance of Social Protection**

According to the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), Social protection reduces poverty and inequality, protects people from risks they face across their life-cycle, increases human capital and supports economic growth. Social protection helps children to stay in school, the children of poor families who cannot afford school supplies or who depend on income from child labour are still likely to not enroll, attend less and drop out early. In these cases, social protection instruments allow families to buy clothes and school supplies and send their children to school.

Social protection slows the spread of HIV as it can help to reduce the risk of infection by providing incentives against risky sexual behaviours by teenagers. In terms of agriculture, households that are affected by HIV/AIDS face decreasing labour availability and asset status over time and become less able to produce enough, either for subsistence or for income generation. Money that would otherwise be spent on fertilisers and other inputs is allocated towards paying for medicines. Social protection activities include voucher systems for improving access to farm inputs and promoting labour saving technologies. Furthermore, it narrows the poverty gap by enabling disadvantaged people to protect themselves and their goods against shocks and disasters, by increasing access to public services and investing in human capital, in particular public health and education, by supporting the disadvantaged groups in labour markets. For example, in South Africa, workers in households receiving social cash transfers are able to better search for work than those in comparable households not receiving these grants and they are more successful in finding employment as a result.

**Poverty and Vulnerability in Zambia**

According to UNESCO, poverty is defined in either relative or absolute terms. Absolute poverty measures poverty in relation to the amount of money necessary to meet basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. The concept of absolute poverty is not concerned with broader quality of life issues or with the overall level of inequality in society. The concept therefore fails to recognize that individuals have important social and cultural needs. This and similar criticisms led to the development of the concept of relative poverty. Relative poverty defines poverty in relation to the economic status of other members of the society: people are poor if they fall below prevailing standards of living in a given societal context. An important criticism of both concepts is that they are largely concerned with income and consumption.
In order to fight poverty, Zambia has been a signatory to United Nations global goals like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which set human and economic development goals and targets to be attained between 1990 and 2015. Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger was goal number one whose specific targets was to reduce poverty and hunger by half by the end of 2015. Unfortunately, the MDGs were not achieved by the end of 2015 and by the end of that year, Zambia was still one of the poorest countries in the world. It is unfortunate that Zambia’s economic growth has not translated into poverty reduction. In 2015, Zambia’s national poverty levels, according to the Living Conditions Monitoring Survey, stood as high as 54.4% and rural poverty at 76.6%. The chronic nature of the prevalent poverty in Zambia has significantly eroded away people’s ability to withstand shocks in the face of vulnerability and risks. As a consequence, traditional poverty reduction efforts have not resulted in significant gains for the fight against poverty. Zambia is now a signatory to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) whose objectives is to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The set targets in the SDGs are to be achieved by the year 2030.

Types of Social Protection in Zambia

According to the National Policy on Social Protection of 2014, the Government and other stakeholders have been implementing several social assistance interventions targeting specific categories of beneficiaries. These have taken the form of non-contributory transfers either in cash or in kind, fee waivers and subsidies with a view of reducing poverty. These interventions specifically target those who lack the inherent capacity to work, rather than those who are failing to meet their needs to through shortcomings in various aspects of their circumstances such as limited access to markets, insufficient capital or land. Programmes of this nature provide assistance to the needy people aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of the socio-economic situation. Those targeted are the aged persons, the disabled or chronically ill, female headed households, orphans and vulnerable children, displaced or disaster victims and all others who are genuinely unable to support themselves. Programmes of this nature include Public Welfare Assistance Schemes (PWAS), Social Cash Transfer Scheme (SCTS), Nutrition and Supplementary Feeding Interventions such as the home-grown School Feeding Programme, bursaries and scholarships, and the resettlement and rehabilitation of people with disabilities (PWDs) and Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs).

Social Security

Social Security is defined as all social transfers in cash or in kind that are provided by the Government or private sector organisations which are agreed upon through collective bargaining. These existing social security schemes include contributory pension schemes under the National Pension Scheme Authority, the Public Service Pension Fund, the Local Authority Retirement Fund and other schemes offered by the private sector.

Livelihood and Empowerment

These seek to provide support to households and groups who lack sufficient capacity to generate adequate reliable income that strengthen their livelihoods and include provision of
finance, agricultural inputs and entrepreneurship skills including public works to promote community infrastructure and assets. In Zambia, specific programmes include the Farmer Input Support Programme, Food Security Pack, Women Empowerment Fund, Functional Literacy and Skills Training, Community Self Help Initiatives and Micro Bankers Trust.

**Social Protection in Relation to Basic Needs Basket**

The cost of living has remained high as shown by consecutive Basic Needs Baskets while the average monthly income for households, according to the 2015 Living Conditions Monitoring Survey is K1, 801. JCTR notes that the gap between cost of living and income is too wide and it is contributing to increase poverty levels within the country.

**Challenges**

a) Poor coordination among donors, NGOs and Government in programme implementation has impeded the progress of social protection

b) Lack of legal framework that protects social protection and endorses accountability has contributed to it not being effective

c) Inadequate manpower in the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services has hampered the progress of social protection

d) Targeting of the most vulnerable has proved to be a challenge and many are left out from benefitting. This is because Government information system that retrieves data from a programmes’s data base into information that can be used for efficient and effective management has not been well established

e) Inadequate funding and low budgetary

**Conclusion**

It is without doubt that over 50% of Zambia’s population are living in poverty and have inadequate access to quality social services. Examining the implications of following different social protection pathways to reduce poverty and vulnerability and to establish long-term social protection institutions remains an urgent need for Zambia.