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**Social Protection and Coloniality:
Learning from the past and present**

TANZANIA CASE STUDY

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February 2025



**Centre for the
Study of Global
Development – CSGD**

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Executive Summary

Tanzania has made significant strides in expanding its social protection system over the past decade. Yet, traces of colonial governance models, donor dependency, and systemic exclusions remain embedded in policy processes and institutions. This study examines the evolution and current processes of social protection policymaking in Mainland Tanzania, to better understand the role and impact of external influences, and how these intersect with domestic factors in shaping social protection. The study deploys qualitative methodologies, including semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis, to capture stakeholder perspectives on the ground and collate existing historical evidence.

The historical evolution of social protection in Tanzania can be divided into five key phases. During the **German colonial period (1885–1918)**, social protection was almost non-existent, as the administration prioritised infrastructure for resource extraction. The **British colonial rule (1919–1961)** introduced early formal social protection mechanisms, such as the Government Employee Provident Fund in 1942, which provided minimal benefits to a small group of African workers employed in the colonial administration. The **post-independence era (1961–1985)** saw President Julius Nyerere's socialist Ujamaa policies, which pursued a broad social policy vision with free healthcare, free primary education, and collective farming (villagisation) to improve social welfare, though economic challenges limited their effectiveness. Economic liberalisation during the **structural adjustment period (1986–2000)** led to introduction of fees in health and education, retrenchment of public sector jobs, and reduced government spending on social protection, increasing poverty and inequality. During the **modern reform era in the 2000s**, Tanzania has focused on expanding social protection, including through conditional cash transfers, social insurance schemes to informal sector workers, and legislative reforms to promote universal health coverage.

The study findings indicate that colonialism has left its imprints across three distinct areas. Firstly, the German and British colonial administrations established extractive economic models focused on cash crop production and mining, which created long-lasting **economic dependencies**. These models prioritised the needs of the colonial powers, leading to underdevelopment in rural areas and a low positioning in global value chains that persists today, which restricts the domestic fiscal space for social protection investments. Secondly, the British colonial powers introduced the first public governance and administrative structures, as well as formal **social protection institutions**. These colonial-era institutions shaped Tanzania's modern social protection architecture, which continues to exclude informal workers and rural communities from statutory social protection entitlements, reinforcing systemic inequalities. Thirdly, the colonial administration centralised governance and replaced traditional community welfare mechanisms with formal but limited **social protection models**. This legacy has resulted in a bifurcated social protection framework, where formal sector employees benefit from structured programmes, while informal workers rely on informal social safety nets and targeted social assistance.

Analysis of postcolonial dynamics highlights the significance of donor influence on social protection arrangements, especially since the 1980s. Global policy agendas and paradigms are key in explaining shifts in social protection policymaking. Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) introduced in the 1980s under the neoliberal Washington Consensus dismantled Tanzania's earlier socialist development approach and drastically reshaped the country's economic framework, prioritising austerity over social welfare. Since, Tanzania's social protection investments social protection policies are frequently drafted in alignment with global agendas rather than being rooted in local realities, limiting their effectiveness and uptake. Given that Tanzania remains heavily dependent on international development aid, **development cooperation** constitutes another important axis of external influence, perceived as a form of neocolonialism by some. The extent of donor influence varies across social protection domains, such as social insurance, cash transfers, and insurance schemes for informal workers, while the World Bank constitutes a uniquely powerful actor due to its leading financier position. Donors deploy a range of **policy transfer tactics** to direct social protection policymaking processes on the ground, including funding modalities, technical assistance, training programs, and study visits. Collaboration with international partners has also facilitated positive innovations, such as the ongoing adoption of adaptive social protection measures in response to climate change.

The collected evidence on domestic factors shows that these are key in explaining the evolution of social protection arrangements in Tanzania, and issues of effectiveness in the current social protection model. The case of Tanzania illustrates the pertinence of **domestic ideologies** in guiding social protection investments. The early independence leader Julius Nyerere's emphasis on African Socialism and self-reliance led to the adoption of an ambitious social welfare agenda, and domestic actors continue to draw inspiration on Ujamaa values even though subsequent leaders have shifted towards more market-oriented policies. **Domestic elites** continue to exercise their power also to alter social protection mechanisms in their preferred direction even in the context of largely donor-funded cash transfers, while **civil society actors** play a role in challenging both the government and development partners. At the same time, **limited implementation capacity, weak governance structures and corruption** impede the effective delivery of social protection programs. Rural areas, in particular, suffer from inadequate oversight, reducing the reach and impact of social protection interventions.

The findings of this study point to several ways forward:

- **Strengthening Domestic Financing.** Stakeholders emphasised that insufficient domestic resources are not incidental but rather systematic, reflecting deeper structural constraints that explain the significant external influence in social protection processes. This persistent resource scarcity compels the government to rely on international development aid, further entrenching donor-driven policy priorities at the expense of nationally designed and locally adapted strategies. Enhancing domestic resource mobilisation through improved taxation policies and economic diversification is crucial to reducing dependency on donor funding. Tanzania must strategically position itself within global value chains to maximize revenue from its natural resources and agriculture, thereby creating fiscal space for sustainable social protection investments. To truly support Tanzania in building a sustainable and inclusive social protection system, development partners must reconsider the dominant role of Western actors in high-value sectors, such as extractive industries. Development cooperation should prioritise fair economic engagement, long-term capacity building, policy autonomy, and respect for locally driven strategies that align with Tanzania's aspirations for self-reliance and economic sovereignty.
- **Government Leadership.** The government must assume greater ownership of social protection policy formulation and implementation, ensuring alignment with national priorities. Addressing misuse of funds and resource waste, improving coordination across ministries and partners, and ensuring more effective use of resources will be key to fostering a robust and self-reliant social protection system.
- **Recognising informal approaches and 're-imagining' social protection.** Informal social protection mechanisms are extensive, deeply institutionalised in the Tanzanian social and economic fabric and the primary source of social protection for the majority of the population. Domestic and external policymakers should explore ways to integrate these approaches into attempts to expand the social protection system, leveraging their strengths while addressing their limitations. Stakeholders also emphasised the collective social organisation into communities rather than households to be more authentic to the local context. There is a need to re-imagine social protection through this lens, ensuring that traditional and informal welfare mechanisms are recognised and strengthened rather than displaced by externally imposed frameworks. Engagement with civil society actors will be essential to ensuring locally relevant solutions.
- **Promoting south-south cooperation.** Strengthening regional collaboration and knowledge-sharing with other African nations can help Tanzania develop homegrown social protection strategies that reflect its socio-economic realities. Learning from successful models in similar contexts can inform policy reforms that reduce dependency on external actors. However, such collaboration should be locally driven, ensuring that Tanzanian policymakers and institutions take the lead in defining priorities and approaches to avoid the replication of externally imposed frameworks elsewhere and instead foster solutions that are culturally and economically aligned with Tanzania's unique context.