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A rapid political economy analysis concerning domestic commitment to social assistance in Zambia

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Abstract:

Support for government-provided social assistance in Zambia and the Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCTP) in particular has been on a clear upwards trajectory since at least 2013. In the same year, the late President Michael Sata announced a 700 percent increase in the government budget allocated to the SCTP. Coverage levels have grown substantially from 32,643 households in 2011 to 574,663 by 2017 and from 19 districts to all 109. At the same time, however, evidence has indicated a considerable gap between budgetary commitments and disbursements to the SCTP, raising questions over how much the SCTP is indeed a key priority. In addition, given that the SCTP has become a flagship programme of the ruling Patriotic Front (PF) party, the question emerges over how far the rhetoric of support for social assistance is shared beyond the current ruling political party. This brief explores the questions raised by the above, reporting on the findings of a rapid political economy analysis that considers the question ***how strong is domestic ownership or buy-in to social assistance (and the social cash transfer in particular), what is driving this, and what is required to entrench it further?*** The analysis draws on findings from a range of secondary literature on social protection in Zambia and the political economy surrounding it while also presenting findings from new primary research gathered through a survey of 50 Members of the Zambian Parliament.

Key messages:

- *Despite divisions in views and preferences across party lines, there is evidence of support for increasing government spending on social protection in broad terms and strong support for expanding funding for the SCTP in particular among both government and opposition Zambian MPs. This is matched by evidence of strong public backing for social cash transfers targeting vulnerable households.*
- *At first glance, the above and the recent expansion of the SCTP indicates evidence of growing domestic ownership and buy-in to social assistance, which has to date been heavily financed and supported by international donors. These developments and findings could raise the possibility of a “positive politicisation” of the SCTP whereby competition between political parties may arise that would help consolidate, strengthen and more firmly domesticate the programme.*
- *However, a number of issues currently put into question or threaten this scenario from emerging, including: (i) the gap between government budgetary allocations and disbursements to the SCTP; (ii) perceptions of patronage associated with the SCTP and other social assistance programmes among opposition MPs; and (iii) continued misconceptions and misplaced beliefs about certain aspects of social protection.*

1. Background and literature review

The advancement of social protection in Zambia in recent years, and of the social cash transfer programme (SCTP) in particular, represents a positive development based on national and global evidence on the scale of positive impacts that can be achieved within an affordable financial envelope.^{1,2,3} This view is further reinforced considering it also represents a gradual progression towards the realisation of internationally recognised rights to social protection.⁴

However, as noted by Pruce and Hickey (2017), although the rise of the social protection agenda in recent years has been in part driven by shifting dynamics in Zambia's domestic political settlement, it has also been heavily influenced by "the promotional efforts of a transnational policy coalition" comprising "international donors, government officials and civil society actors".⁵ This raises important questions over *the strength of domestic ownership of or buy-in to the recent expansion of social assistance and the SCTP in particular, what has been driving it, and what is required to entrench it further.*⁶ These represent the main research question of this study.

Indeed, despite the very laudable increased budgetary commitment by the Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) to the SCTP and the substantial scaling up in coverage, analysis has shown that in 2018 there were significant gaps

between what was formally budgeted and what was disbursed.⁷ Added to this is the question of how far commitment to expanding social assistance and the SCTP cuts across political party lines or whether it remains seen as a programme of the ruling party and international donors to be opposed and scaled back at a future point in time.

A handful of papers have explored the politics of social protection in the context of Zambia. In 2005 Barrientos et al. looked at what the drivers and barriers of change were for achieving a national social protection scheme.⁸ However, since then, the social protection landscape has changed considerably, and a national social protection programme has indeed been achieved in the form of the SCTP. Other more recent studies that have looked at attitudes relating to cash transfers in Zambia and the political dynamics behind social protection have also now been overtaken by recent policy shifts.^{9,10}

Most recently, Siachiwena explored the importance of politics in explaining the surge in government support for the pro-poor SCTP following the election of the late President Sata and the Patriotic Front party in 2011, alongside the apparent paradox of continued support for the Farmer Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) that has been heavily criticised for its ineffectiveness, proneness to patronage, and high cost.^{11,12} This is complemented by analysis from Pruce and Hickey who compare the progress made on SCTP and the

¹ Bastagli et al. (2016) Cash transfers: what does the evidence say? A rigorous review of impacts and the role of design and implementation features.

² American Institutes for Research (2014) Zambia's Child Grant Program: 36-month impact report. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

³ Jomaa, L., McDonnell, E. & Probart, C. (2011). School feeding programs in developing countries: Impacts on children's health and educational outcomes. *Nutrition reviews*. 69. 83-98.

⁴ Devereux, S. (2017). The Right to Social Protection in Africa: From CCCDFPRTs to CLSPPPs. *Law in Africa*, 20(1), 11-32.

⁵ Pruce, K. and Hickey, S. (2017). *The politics of promoting social protection in Zambia*. ESID Working Paper. Global Development Institute. The University of Manchester. Manchester, UK.

⁶ The term social assistance and social protection are used interchangeably in this brief, though the former represents a sub-set of the latter, being transfers in cash or in kind to address vulnerability and socio-economic risks. Social protection additionally comprises social insurance and labour

market policies, including legislation such as minimum wages and maternity employment policies.

⁷ ZIPAR (2018) Analytical Brief of the 2019 Social Sector Budget 'A call for fairness and elimination of wastage'.

⁸ Barrientos, A., Hickey, S., Simutanyi, N. and Wood, D. (2005). Report of Study on Drivers of Change for a National Social Protection Scheme in Zambia.

⁹ Habasonda, L. M. (2009). *Political Economy of Cash Transfers in Zambia*. London: ODI.

¹⁰ Schüring, E. & Lawson-McDowall, J. (2011). *Social protection in Zambia - whose politics?* Paper presented at the Social Protection for Social Justice, Institute of Development Studies, UK.

¹¹ Siachiwena, H. (2016). *Social protection policy reform in Zambia during the Sata presidency 2011-2014*. CSSR Working Paper. Centre for Social Science Research, University of Cape Town. Cape Town.

¹² Siachiwena, H. (2017). *Social policy reform in Zambia under President Lungu, 2015-2017*. CSSR Working Paper. Centre for Social Science Research, University of Cape Town. Cape Town.

Social Health Insurance (SHI), highlighting the interplay between domestic political economy and transnational factors in explaining commitment to the SCTP and SHI.¹³ Echoing findings from Siachiwena, they conclude that commitment to social protection “has not yet displaced certain interests, ideas and rent-allocation practices that are more deeply embedded within Zambia’s political settlement” but hint that an opportunity does exist to more deeply embed social cash transfers within Zambia’s distributional regime in a way that is not based on clientelism, but rather a new “citizenship-based social contract”.

The present study contributes to and updates this rich literature on the political economy of social protection in Zambia.

2. Method and framework

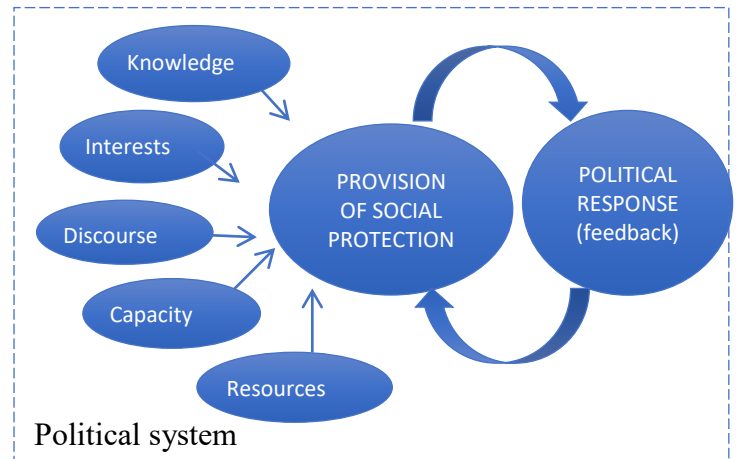
The study adopts a mixed-methods approach to carry out a *Problem-Driven Political Economy Analysis*. On the one hand it involves a review of the existing secondary literature using the framework described further below, while also integrating analysis of new primary data gathered through a survey of 50 Zambian Members of Parliament (MPs) from the ruling and opposition parties. This represents approximately one third of the 156-seat parliament. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the share of MPs interviewed by political affiliation.

Table 1: MPs surveyed by political affiliation

Party	Total	PF	Opposition
	50	18	32
Patriotic Front (PF)	36%	100%	0%
United Party for National Development	38%	0%	59%
Movement for Multiparty Democracy	6%	0%	9%
Independent	20%	0%	31%

Source: IPSOS Zambia.

The framework used as a reference point for considering the expansion of domestically-owned social assistance (Figure 1) was put together drawing on the Drivers of Change framework used by Barrientos et al. (2005),¹⁴ as well as more recent conceptual work on the politics of social assistance in lower income countries.¹⁵



Source: Author

On the left-hand side the framework highlights five core areas that can contain important drivers or barriers of change as outlined by Barrientos et al.¹⁶ These are considered throughout the political economy analysis. For example, the area of ‘interests’ is premised on the need for there to be sufficient interest in the topic of social protection and incentives driving it, culminating in some level of leadership among the political class in order for progress to be realised. Importantly, in the case of countries where donors have played a key role in kick-starting social protection, it is recognised that, in the long-run, interests of domestic politicians cannot be substituted for by international donors if domestic political ownership is to be achieved.¹⁷

The other aspect to the framework is the presence of a **two-way process** where “politics is crucial to the adoption, design, and implementation of social assistance programmes [but the programmes] also have a feedback effect on local and national politics” and where “perhaps the most significant

¹³ Op. Cit. Pruce and Hickey (2017).

¹⁴ Op. Cit. Barrientos et al. (2005).

¹⁵ Barrientos, A. & Pellissery, S. (2014). Political Factors in the Growth of Social Assistance. In S. Hickey, K. Sen & B. Bukenya

(Eds.), *The Politics of Inclusive Development: Interrogating the Evidence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

¹⁶ Op. Cit. Barrientos et al. (2005).

¹⁷ Barrientos, A. (2016). Justice-based social assistance, *Global Social Policy*, 16(2): 151–165.

feedback effect from social assistance to politics is the rise of social policy and social assistance to the top of the political agenda".¹⁸

In the study, a standard political economy approach was adopted in terms of considering three levels: foundational/ structural factors; institutions/ the 'rules of the game'; and actors and agents.

3. Findings

This section responds to the main research questions: ***how strong is domestic ownership of, or buy-in to, the recent expansion of social assistance and the SCTP in particular, what has been driving it, and what is required to entrench it further?*** Findings are structured around the three levels of analysis mentioned directly above.

Three core ***foundational/ structural factors*** that were identified as important in helping set the context and shaping and explaining the overall findings are:

- i. The relative infancy of state citizen relations and experience of government-provided social protection in Zambia;
- ii. The importance of neo-patrimonial politics in shaping government policies and the tension now emerging with the more rights-based or citizen-based approach integral to the concept of social protection; and
- iii. Poverty, inequality and Zambia's current economic position.

The point concerning neo-patrimonial politics highlights in particular the challenge of moving towards the forms of governance and state-citizen relationship required by social protection, which are driven not by the exchange of state resources in return for support and loyalty (i.e. patronage), but rather by more rights-based entitlements set out with clear eligibility criteria.

An important distinction exists here between the more negative involvement of politics in the form of clientelist patronage relationships and the potential for a "positive politicisation" of social

protection programmes, where they end up being expanded due to the perceived broader political capital or electoral dividends that arise from supporting such expansion and associated competition between political parties.¹⁹ This more positive form of politicisation (in the sense that it involves a broader and less patronage-based form of expanding coverage) has been seen in numerous large-scale cash transfer programmes, for example in Brazil, Pakistan and the Philippines.²⁰

The third point on poverty, inequality and the economy helps to partly explain the impetus for an expansion in social protection, given Zambia's status as a lower middle-income country with stubbornly high levels of poverty, deprivation and monetary inequality. When combined with the country's current economic situation and associated Economic Stabilisation and Growth Programme (ESGP) and the perceived 'crisis of legitimacy' that occurred relating to the FISP in 2013, it provides a strong impetus for expansion of social protection in order to protect the poorest and most vulnerable from risks experienced throughout the life-cycle. Expansion of social protection does indeed form a key part of the ESGP.

Yet, at the same time, the tight fiscal space may also present challenges to the government and test its commitment to prioritising social protection over other areas. Potentially related to this is the gap that has been identified between spending commitments and actual disbursements for social protection. For example, according to a 2018 midyear budget analysis by ZIPAR, evidence suggests just 27% of the allocation for social protection was disbursed.²¹ However, it is not clear to what extent this is indeed due to problems of liquidity or rather reflects the extent of government commitment to the social protection sector.

However, a promising development in the structural composition of government spending in recent years has been the gradual reduction in spending away from other areas of substantial

¹⁸ Op. Cit. Barrientos and Pellissery (2014).

¹⁹ Op. Cit. Devereux (2017).

²⁰ Sarwar, M. B. (2018) The political economy of cash transfer programmes in Brazil, Pakistan and the Philippines When do

governments 'leave no one behind'? Working Paper 543. London: ODI.

²¹ ZIPAR (2018). Midyear Budget Analysis.

government spending, such as the FISP and the Food Reserve Agency, affording the possibility of increased investment in social assistance in the future. That said, Zambia's economic situation combined with stubborn poverty levels does mean that there is increasingly likely to be demands on social assistance (if government budget for it continues to increase) to demonstrate what economic benefits it brings so that it is not simply seen as unaffordable largesse or welfare handouts that are pure consumption without bringing any economic return.

When it comes to *institutions/ 'rules of the game'* three key points are particularly important:

- 1) Just as social protection is itself a relatively recent issue, the National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) is also a very young policy, being finalised in 2014. It will therefore take some time still for it to become well understood and embedded across the political spectrum.
- 2) As the NSPP highlights, the legislative framework around social protection in Zambia is currently inadequate for ensuring that citizens in Zambia can effectively claim their right to social protection (that is, it is not justiciable). It does not appear that such legislative reform is on the cards any time soon, which will continue to represent an obstacle to social protection becoming more firmly entrenched within the social contract.
- 3) Despite some perceived reversion to clientelistic political practices following the late President Sata's death leading one author in 2017 to suggest that "social protection has not yet emerged as a salient electoral issue in Zambia",²² as the SCTP has grown it has increasingly featured in electoral campaigning, such as in the 2016 election when billboards of Lungu and his running mate Wina were erected, stating that 1.2 million beneficiaries had been reached by SCTs under the PF government. This is an important point, firstly as it shows that the PF believe that highlighting the achievements of the SCT programme conveys an important electoral message, and secondly, such explicit

references to policy during elections is to some extent relatively novel in that elections are typically not used as platforms to debate policy.

Finally, the study considered a range of key *actors and agents* of relevance. A stakeholder mapping was conducted to place key actors across an axis on the basis of their interest in and support for expanding social assistance and their power to execute or influence on the other (Annex 1).

Among the key findings coming out from this level are:

The role of **international organisations, including donors and other cooperating partners** has been central over the last few decades in helping build the evidence and basic political constituencies for cash transfers in particular, and for social assistance more broadly. However, Zambia now rests at a juncture where, the major driver for longer-term sustainability and institutionalisation of cash transfers and social assistance rests in domestic actors. There is also an understanding between international development partners and the GRZ that the government will take over financial responsibility for the SCTP, yet as noted earlier, despite significant scaling up of government financial commitments to the SCTP, there remain significant gaps between allocated and disbursed funds.

Although donors do have a strong interest in the expansion of cost-effective social assistance, their scope for influence over achieving a nationally-owned and entrenched social protection system will likely now shift and rely increasingly on domestic political actors and national civil society.

The other central driving force of expansion of social assistance has been **State house** (the Presidency). This began under the late President Sata and has continued under President Lungu, with one observer claiming this was due to social cash transfers being identified as the best way of providing a safety net for the poorest.²³ This is despite the issues raised earlier concerning the gap between budgetary allocations and disbursements and claims by the same observer that the shifting

²² Op. Cit. Siachiwena (2017).

²³ Ibid.

political allegiances had introduced a return to support of certain more clientelist programmes.

Looking beyond the central executive and at **the legislature**, the study identified a range of very interesting findings from the survey of MPs, three of which are summarised here (see Annex 2 for graphs):

- The importance of social protection has become increasingly entrenched among MPs, with 80% responding that the government should priority more spending on it. However, views on the effectiveness of various programmes are mixed. While MPs from the ruling PF are most supportive of the SCTP, the opposition are more likely to support the FISP/e-voucher as the most effective poverty reduction method.
- Such a split in preferences may reflect the perception that social protection programmes privilege PF constituencies, raising the risk that programmes have become politicised. However, for all programmes, opposition MPs were less likely to report them being active in their constituencies and this is something that needs to be investigated further empirically. An alternative explanation is that the lower levels of support for SCTP among opposition MPs could reflect opposition to what may be seen as a government flagship programme.
- Nevertheless, even though MPs remain supportive of FISP/e-voucher and the FRA, there is appetite to expand funding for SCTs *ahead* of these agricultural programmes. The clear first preference across all MPs when asked which programme they would expand funding to most was the SCTP, with 56% on average making it their first choice (67% of government MPs and 50% opposition).
- However, further support for the SCTP may hinge crucially upon addressing some of the various reservations and views that were highlighted in responses of MPs (e.g. over SCTs creating dependency and the view that they are less effective at poverty reduction than

agricultural programmes even though livelihood strengthening may not be their primary purpose).

The broad support among MPs for expanding funding to the SCTP appears to be mirrored in results of recent national **public** attitudes surveys, which have shown increasing levels of awareness of the SCTP and as much as 80% of respondents believing them to be a good use of public funds.²⁴

Finally, the study found that **international and national civil society** has considerable latent potential to address a number of the key obstacles identified as holding back greater entrenchment of social assistance within Zambia. For example, playing a role in strengthening accountability, inclusiveness and raising wider public awareness. However, to date the work that is taking place appears more ad hoc rather than part of a coordinated and strategic approach and the sector would benefit from much greater investment in capacity and dedicated programmes of work.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Despite divisions in views and preferences across party lines, there is evidence of support for increasing government spending on social protection in broad terms and strong support for expanding funding for the SCTP in particular among both government and opposition Zambian MPs. This is matched by evidence of strong public backing for social cash transfers targeting vulnerable households.

At first glance, the above and the recent expansion of the SCTP indicates evidence of growing domestic ownership and buy-in to social assistance, which has to date been heavily financed and supported by international donors. These developments and findings (combined with the results of the survey of MPs and public attitudes) could raise the possibility of a “positive politicisation” of the SCTP whereby it becomes an electorally salient issue and competition between political parties may arise that would help consolidate, strengthen and more firmly domesticate the programme and social assistance more broadly.

However, several factors currently put into question or threaten this scenario from emerging.

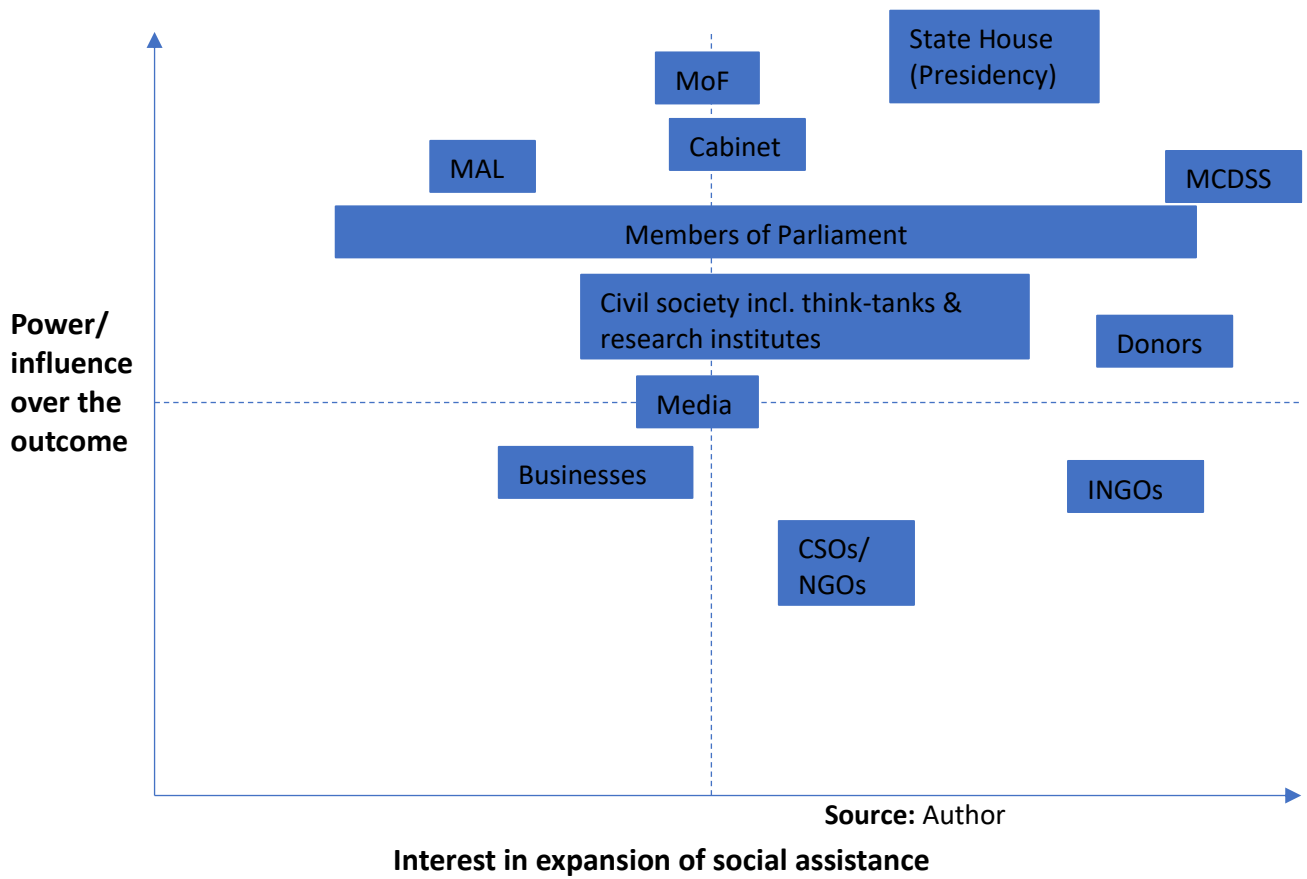
²⁴ Unpublished survey results.

These include: (i) the gap between government budgetary allocations and disbursements to the SCTP which at best represents challenges of managing tight fiscal space or at worst represents a lack of prioritisation of the SCTP; (ii) perceptions of patronage associated with the SCTP and other social assistance programmes among opposition MPs could create a political divide between parties in their support for certain programmes; and (iii) continued negative perceptions which have been refuted strongly through global evidence or misunderstandings about certain aspects of social protection programmes and their objectives and place within broader social and economic policy.

Based on the above, the following four recommendations are made to help further entrench domestic support for social assistance:

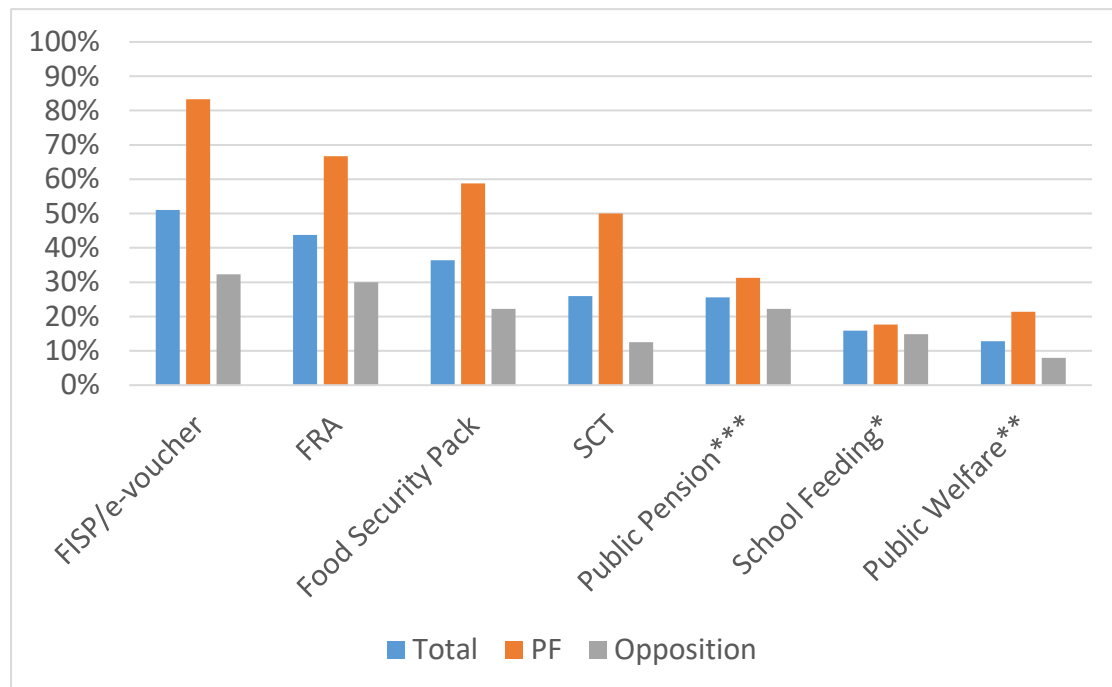
- I. Development partners should further invest in the capacity of national civil society including research organisations and media, both for increasing awareness among the wider public and political elite around the concept of social protection (what it is and what it is not), tackling commonly held myths, misconceptions and sharing impact evidence, including around wider economic benefits of the SCTP, as well as helping ensure accountability and inclusiveness.
- II. Work with national civil society and media as well as appropriate members of the legislature to support dialogue on legislative reform to work towards a legal right to social protection that is justiciable in Zambian law.
- III. Further research should be commissioned to understand the gap between budget allocated to social protection and budget that is disbursed and, to the extent this reflects lower prioritisation of social protection, identify options for addressing it.
- IV. Empirical research should be commissioned to investigate further the result from the survey of MPs that opposition MPs perceive coverage of social protection programmes to be less common in their constituencies.

Annex 1: Stakeholder mapping of key actors and institutions within the social protection sphere in Zambia



Annex 2: Selected results from the MP survey

Q5. Of these programmes, which do you think is very effective at reducing poverty?



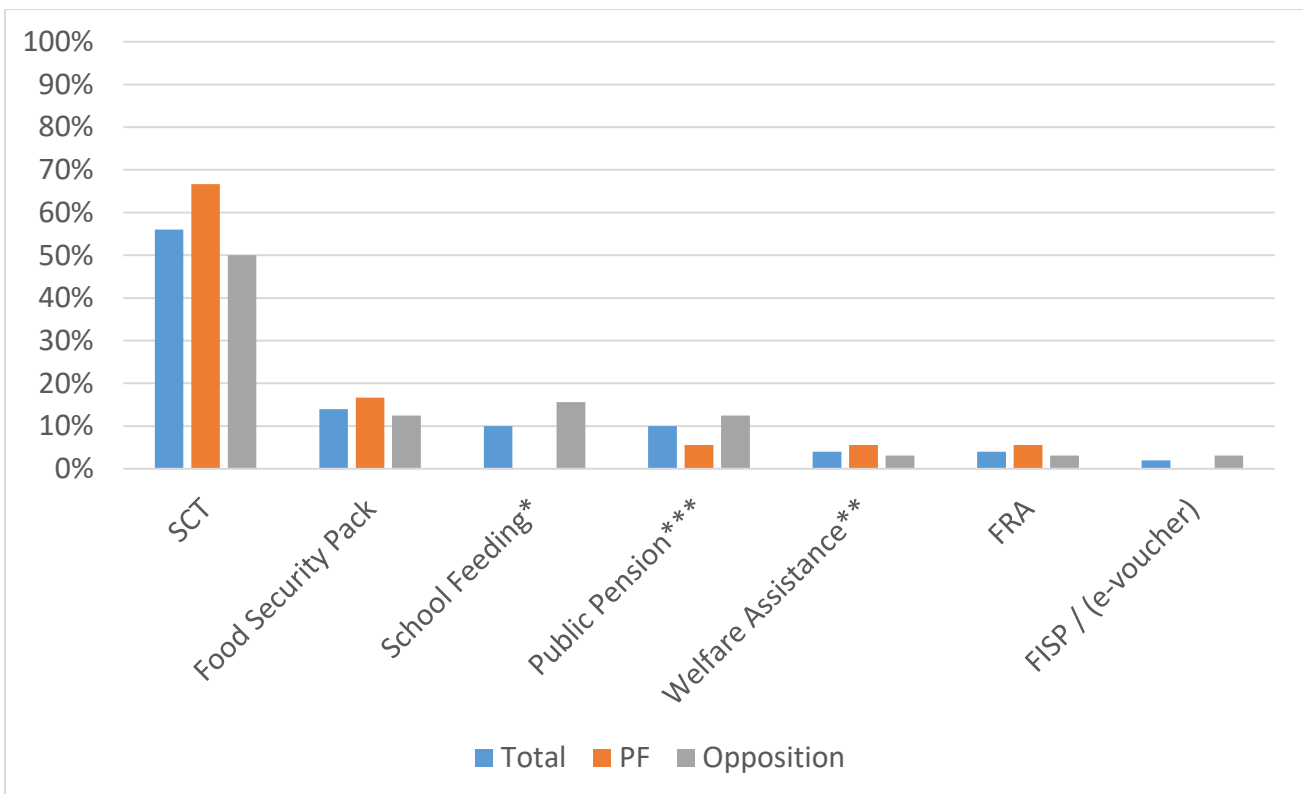
Q6a. If we asked you to say which of the programmes we discussed is the **MOST** effective at reducing poverty, which ones would you select?

	Total	Party affiliation	
		PF	Opposition
Total	50	18	32
Social Cash Transfer	38%	56%	28%
Home Grown School Feeding Programme	2%	0%	3%
Public Welfare Assistance Scheme	2%	0%	3%
Food Security Pack	4%	0%	6%
Public Service Pension Fund	2%	0%	3%
FRA	2%	6%	0%
FISP / (e-voucher)	46%	28%	56%
Other	4%	11%	0%

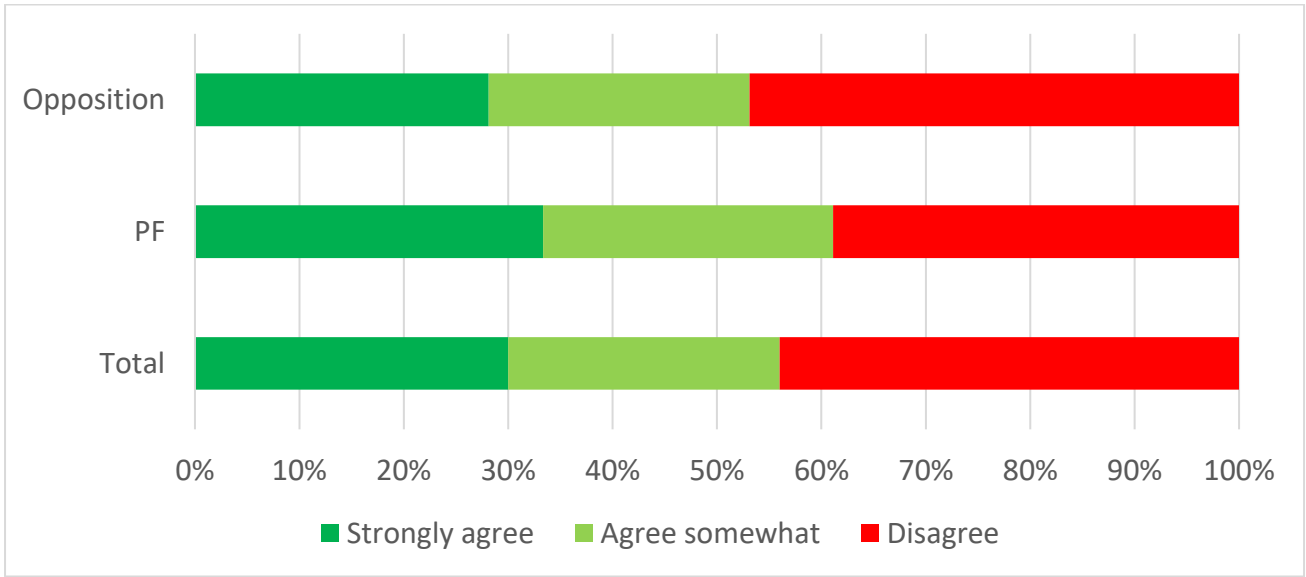
Q6b. If we asked you to say which of the programmes we discussed is the **LEAST** effective at reducing poverty, which ones would you select?

	Total	Party affiliation	
		PF	Opposition
Total	50	18	32
Social Cash Transfer	26%	17%	31%
Home Grown School Feeding Programme	10%	6%	13%
Public Welfare Assistance Scheme	4%	11%	0%
Food Security Pack	6%	11%	3%
Public Service Pension Fund	10%	6%	13%
FRA	22%	22%	22%
FISP / (e-voucher)	16%	22%	13%
Other	2%	0%	3%
Dont Know	4%	6%	3%

Q7. If funding were available to expand these programmes, which three programmes in order of preference would you like to see get more funding? (First preference shown)



Q21. Some people are uncomfortable with the idea of governments giving out money unconditionally as they believe it will lead to dependency or encourage laziness, do you agree with this view?



Q4. Which of these programmes are active in your constituency?

