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Elite Attitudes Towards Cash Transfers and the Poor in Malawi

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DLP aims to increase understanding of the political processes that drive or constrain development. Its work focuses on the crucial role of home-grown leaderships and coalitions in forging legitimate institutions that promote developmental outcomes.

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Executive summary

This paper argues that the planning of cash transfer (CT) programmes needs to involve more consideration of the country-specific attitudes of elites. It is members of a country's elites who are often expected to implement – and in the long term, allocate domestic funding to – such programmes. The paper presents findings from primary research in Malawi that examined elites' attitudes towards poverty and how to reduce it. It shows that their attitudes – about the risk of dependency among the poor and about direct redistribution being unfair, for example – affect which policies they are willing to support and implement. The findings question the sustainability of Malawi's CTs beyond donor funding. They suggest there would be more support among Malawi's elites for other forms of social protection such as public works and strategies that help the poor become economically active.

Cash transfers can be defined as direct and regular non-contributory cash payments that raise or smooth the incomes of poor and vulnerable households. Donors and NGOs have proposed cash transfers as part of social protection programming in many developing countries, particularly in Africa. However, the crucial role that politics plays in decisions about the allocation of resources has often been overlooked. The political economy issues that have received little attention include attitudes to the poor and to welfare.

Methodology

Fifty-two members of Malawi's elites took part in semi-structured interviews and 86 completed a questionnaire. The research also involved non-participant observation, and documentary analysis (of policy and budget documents, government publications and statistics, political speeches, official records and media reports).

Members of Malawi's elites were defined not by wealth but as people holding strategic positions in political, governmental, economic, communication, cultural and donor organisations, and social movements. Research participants were chosen through purposive sampling. They included government ministers and MPs from the main political parties; and senior figures in the civil service, the private sector, civil society, academia, the media, INGOs and donor organisations.

Key findings

Evidence of positive impacts of cash transfers in Malawi is not changing elites' views of what causes poverty, or producing support for cash transfers. Previous studies have found that Malawi's cash transfers have led to increased nutrition and food security, local trading, school enrolments and attendance, and household disposable incomes, while substantially lowering teenage marriage and pregnancy rates.

Yet our findings show that Malawi's elites prefer policies that support those among the poor who can work to help themselves. Many respondents' ideas about the poor – that they are passive, dependent, and fatalistic – seemed to contribute to a lack of support for social assistance schemes like cash transfers. These were seen as likely to encourage laziness or dependency.

Elites' perceptions of the causes of poverty

Discussing the causes of poverty, respondents identified the main factors as:

- lack of national economic growth
- low levels of education
- lack of access to productive assets such as land
- behavioural causes, such as a lack of political will to fight poverty and the response of the poor to their own poverty.

Respondents spoke of a **'culture of poverty'** that explained how the poor might be responsible for their own problems. This culture among the poor was said by respondents to have a number of components.

- **A fatalistic mindset** that discourages efforts to escape poverty:

  '…[the poor] are busy living day-to-day arguing that "my parents were poor so I will also end up poor no matter what I try".' (Principal Secretary)

- **Unwise use of resources**, leading to wasted opportunities:

  'Some people even make money from growing of tobacco but they will decide to marry another wife rather than building a house with the proper roofing….' (Principal Secretary)

- **A culture of dependency** involving over-reliance on handouts:

  'They know that if they do not work someone will come to help them.' (National Coordinator, CSO)

Elites' policy preferences

Most respondents favoured policies that would have wide benefits, or support the 'active' poor: micro finance programmes (selected as viable and desirable by 77% of survey respondents), public works programmes (71%) and fertiliser subsidies (59%). Free and universal education (70%) and healthcare (59%) were seen as likely to support people to contribute to national economic growth.

Social protection strategies were far less popular: cash transfers (31%), child benefits (29%) and unemployment insurance (15%) were all rejected by a majority of respondents. Only an old age pension (48%) came close to majority approval. Participants believed recipients 'consume' rather than invest cash transfers, and that CTs support the 'inactive' poor.

Policies that appeal to respondents across all categories – with the exception of INGOs/donors – appear to be those that address broader development challenges and thus benefit the entire nation, rather than those that target poor individuals. Elites argue that poverty is so widespread that most Malawians can be considered poor. They view assistance targeted at the 'ultra poor' – perceived as the 'inactive' poor – as unfair.

Most research participants viewed poverty not as an urgent policy priority, but as a chronic problem that would be solved in the medium to long term by economic development and growth. Many respondents supported this view with the assertion that previous exclusively pro-poor policies had failed.

Policy considerations

Discussion about the sustainability of cash transfers in Malawi and other sub-Saharan African countries has asked whether host governments can afford them, but not whether they have the political will to fund them. Little effort has been made to understand deeply entrenched disapproval of social assistance.

Our research highlights the importance of elites' attitudes in domestic decisions about the allocation of scarce resources. It suggests that:

- Malawi's elites would be unwilling to prioritise the extra funding needed to extend the cash transfer scheme beyond its pilot phase to make it a sustainable national programme. If CTs were to be domestically funded, respondents would not be willing to increase taxes to pay for them.
- Elites may use their attitudes towards poverty to justify policies that favour particular groups of poor people, such as those considered 'active'.

The findings reaffirm the importance of using political analysis to ensure the sustainability of cash transfer programmes, and of domestic ownership for politically viable programming. Lessons from Latin America, where CTs originated, may not be directly applicable to the different contexts in sub-Saharan Africa, such as that of Malawi.

- There is a greater level of vulnerability in many sub-Saharan Africa countries, made worse by HIV/AIDS. Official poverty statistics overlook the vulnerability of many 'elite' households, and how close to poverty the 'non-poor' are. This has implications for the scope of CT programmes and their potential to be divisive where the margin between recipients and non-recipients is particularly narrow.
- Government capacity to design and implement CTs is weaker in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In Malawi, implementation is hindered by poor provision of health and education services that might complement CTs.
- While Latin American CT programmes do not depend on external funding, programmes in sub-Saharan Africa almost always do. Donor-driven CTs in Africa may not reflect domestic priorities, and they appear to be short-term compared to the domestically-funded CTs in Latin America.

1

Introduction

In the last decade attempts to reduce poverty in developing countries have increasingly included the implementation of cash transfers. Following their success, cash transfers have become increasingly used in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and are considered an important tool for reducing poverty. Cash transfers are defined as 'direct, regular and predictable non-contributory cash payments that help poor and vulnerable households' to 'raise and smooth incomes' (Arnold et al., 2011: 7), thereby guaranteeing a minimal consumption level for the recipients. These transfers include: universal programmes that provide minimum incomes to all people without means testing; cash transfers that are conditional on recipients' (or their dependants') uptake of health or educational facilities and are often means tested; and targeted transfers that are earmarked for specific groups such as the elderly (social pensions), children (child grants) or for those considered active (public works programmes). Donors and NGOs often call on governments to ensure that cash transfers are part of the state's social protection programming.

The often-cited rationale for introducing cash transfers is that they contribute to the reduction of poverty and hunger, help stimulate growth and increase the numbers of those accessing health or educational services. Cash transfers are assumed to provide the conditions that incentivise investment, lift restrictions on household productive capacity, transform societal relationships and strengthen state-citizen relations, thereby enhancing state legitimacy (Arnold et al., 2011; Browne, 2013). They serve to even out differences in life chances, to encourage greater equity between generations, and to redress inequities due to race, gender, or health status. Cash transfers are also used to reduce uncertainty, foster entrepreneurial risk-taking, and provide all citizens with a sense of security (Tabor, 2002:13). Keane and Prasad (2000) add that, indirectly, cash transfers can pave the way for structural reforms, privatisation and ultimately growth by compensating those affected by such reforms.

Hoping to realise these benefits, a large number of cash transfer programmes have sprung up across Africa. Policy makers have introduced various forms of cash transfers, examples of which include: the Child Grant Programme (Lesotho, Zambia); Cash Transfers for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (Kenya); Tigray Minimum Social Protection Package (Ethiopia); Social Cash Transfer (Malawi, Zimbabwe); and the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (Ghana) (Afsaw et al., 2012).

Since the upsurge of these cash transfer programmes in Africa, there has been a preoccupation with implementation challenges, such as issues of design, affordability, programme impact and administrative capacity. As a result, political economy considerations have often fallen by the wayside in policy decisions, ignoring the crucial role that politics plays in decisions about the allocation of resources. As Hickey (2007:3) argued, 'most work on social protection in Africa makes little mention of political concerns, and that which does considers only a limited range of variables or makes fairly general references to political commitment or support, without examining how this emerged and might be sustained'. One reason Hickey puts forward for this anomaly is the dominance of economics in this field, which has promoted a 'technocratic approach'.[1]

In addition, most donor-funded cash transfer programmes in Africa are short-term in nature; as a result, these programmes do not often consider longer-term political economy concerns that might be necessary in more sustained cash transfer programmes (Graham, 2002). As Graham (2002:6) argues, 'the establishment of permanent social assistance systems ultimately requires the establishment of a politically sustainable social contract, and therefore fundamental public choices about the allocation of scarce resources'.

1 A technocratic approach is different from the view of development as a long-term process of structural societal transformation. This approach sees development as a short to medium-term outcome of desirable targets that can be measured and compared. Therefore, the state is seen as an impartial instrument for implementing plans and the government as a machine for providing social services and economic growth. This short-term and instrumentalist view tends to depoliticize development by separating it from socio-economic structures, social relations and politics, thereby, failing to understand the processes of resource accumulation, distribution of resources and issues of unequal power relations. It is associated with the failure to understand the political character of the state, its class basis, the uses of official positions and state power by elites (see, for example, Ferguson, 1994; Sumner and Tribe, 2008; and Hudson & Leftwich, 2014).

However, taking into account political economy concerns for cash transfers in the short-term is difficult as it involves understanding a country's political culture and individuals' attitudes about social justice and redistribution. These attitudes 'develop into persistent patterns of political and economic behaviour, and are of particular importance to the degree of political support that can be generated for redistribution and other forms of social assistance' (Graham, 2002: 7). As Harper (2003: 188) points out, attitudes and other 'explanations [for poverty] do not just exist in a vacuum; they have political effects and functions (although they are not necessarily used intentionally)'. Therefore, technical choices around design, and practical concerns such as security, corruption, targeting, feasibility and gender, mask fundamental ideological battles concerning attitudes to the poor and welfare, and who is ultimately responsible for those unable to support themselves (Farrington et al., 2007).

This paper draws on primary research on elite attitudes towards poverty and pro-poor policy in Malawi, and it argues that these attitudes have an impact on the feasibility and sustainability of cash transfers. Elite attitudes come into play in decisions about whether to implement a programme or not; whether a programme should be targeted or universal; whether a programme should be conditional or unconditional; and whether a programme should be permanent or temporary. Although there are studies that have used elite attitudes as a framework of analysis to understand how they shape welfare policies (Moore and Hossain, 1999; De Swaan, 1988), these analyses have been limited to Europe and the USA, with the notable exception of Reis and Moore (2005). This paper represents, to the best of our knowledge, the first such study undertaken in Malawi.

The research consisted of semi-structured interviews with members of the elite, defined as individuals holding strategic positions in powerful organisations, such as political, governmental, economic, communication and cultural organisations, donor agencies and social movements. In addition, survey questionnaires, non-participant observation and documentary analysis were used. Specifically, the questions for the interviews and questionnaire were designed in a way that enabled the collection of information that helped evaluate elite perceptions, attitudes, views and opinions on government priorities. They also identified pro-poor policies that have been implemented in Malawi, and evaluated how poverty impacts elite welfare and their views on the nature of poor people. Documents such as official government publications and official statistics, policy documents, budget documents, political speeches, official reports on and records of poverty and mass media reports were analysed.[2] The emphasis was on understanding what was said in relation to poverty, the poor and pro-poor policy, who said it and why. To observe how elites talked about poverty, their priorities and their opinions about poor people, non-participant observation[3] was used to help capture what elites actually do or say, rather than what they say they do.

Fifty-two individuals were interviewed and eighty-six completed the questionnaires. These individuals held positions of influence over decisions involving the implementation of pro-poor policy.[4] Therefore, participants were chosen through purposive sampling and included occupants of political office (Government Ministers and MPs from the major political parties) the upper echelons of the civil service (Principal Secretaries), leaders of private sector organisations, civil society leaders, academic and media elites, INGO leaders and leaders within donor organisations.[5]

The initial analysis[6] of the interview material involved re-reading the data in the course of transcribing it. To estimate the extent to which elite perceptions were realistic and consistent, they were compared with their attitudes towards other

2 Specifically, the following records were analysed: proceedings of Malawi's parliamentary budget sessions between 1961 and 2007; newspaper articles between 1964 and 2008; twenty six presidential speeches (Dr Banda [1964-1991), Dr Muluzi (1994-2004) and Dr Bingu Wa Mutharika (2004-2008); and various policy documents and reports from the government, donors and NGOs.

3 The following meetings, workshops and debates were observed: training on social protection programming for senior civil society leaders; training for Members of Parliament and dialogue on social protection policy; meeting on the way forward for an old age social pension scheme; Parliamentary Committee on Social and Community Affairs consultative meeting on social protection; Parliamentary budget proceedings; workshop for civil society on social, economic and political programmes in Malawi; a public debate on the national budget; and a round table discussion on development by female Members of Parliament.

4 The list of respondents was drawn from the Ministers' Private Red Book which contains names, addresses and contact telephone numbers of all Ministers, Principal Secretaries, Heads of Departments, Heads of Parastatals and other important people such as Advisors to the President. Another list sourced from Parliament provided the names and contact details of Members of Parliaments as well as heads of different parliamentary Committees, such as the Social and Community Welfare Services, Agriculture, Finance and so on. A list from the Council for Non-Governmental Organisations in Malawi (CONGOMA) provided names of the various registered civil society organizations, heads of these organizations and their contacts. A list of media institutions sourced from the Media Institute of Southern Africa's Malawi chapter (Namisa) provided the names and contact details of editors and journalists. Using these four lists, names were drawn up of possible respondents and priority was given to those organizations dealing with pro-poor policy. Initially, a list of 200 respondents was drawn, which was later reduced to one hundred individuals. One hundred of these respondents were given a questionnaire, and sixty of these respondents were asked for face-to-face interviews. In the end, fifty-two respondents agreed to be interviewed.

5 Those working within donor agencies were classed as elites because of the power and influence they have on pro-poor policy. At least 40% of Malawi's annual budget relies on donor support.

6 Generally the process of analysing data involved categorising and coding interview notes using analytical coding that represented the themes of the key research questions of the study. Statements with similar viewpoints were clustered and labelled with the same code. The codes were grouped by similarity, and themes and relationships were identified so that patterns, commonalities and differences emerged. Nvivo and SPSS were used in the data analysis stage.

aspects of Malawian society and towards other forms of public discourse on poverty in Malawi. These included media coverage, observations of elite meetings and political, government and donor policy documents on poverty. To identify areas where there was consensus or difference in particular elite attitudes among the different elite categories, some elite perceptions are presented in tabular form in addition to data from qualitative questionnaires. Triangulating qualitative and quantitative approaches enabled a fuller, broader and deeper understanding of Malawian elites' perceptions of poverty and the poor. However, the findings did not ensure that the results could be generalised to explain the attitudes and behaviours of other individuals, groups, contexts or settings, or to other time periods. Although we cannot claim generalisability, the use of triangulation permitted us to claim a degree of representativeness and strengthened the inferences drawn from the data.

The findings of this study show that elite attitudes towards redistribution, dependency, equality of opportunity, equality of outcomes, and the 'active' or 'inactive' poor[7] have a bearing on the policies and programmes that elites are willing to support and implement. This offers insight into the kinds of social assistance programmes that are likely to be sustainable beyond donor funding.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows: the next section provides background to the cash transfers in Malawi, discussing the role of donors in transferring them to the African context, and makes a case for the importance of elite attitudes to the sustainability of cash transfers. Section 3 analyses elite attitudes towards poverty, the poor and cash transfers in Malawi. Section 4 concludes the paper, reflecting on the challenges of transferring context-specific policies that can conceal affordability and sustainability issues.

7 The active poor are those that are able bodied, of working age and in good health but who lack productive assets whilst the inactive poor refer to those who are labour constrained such as the elderly, children and the sick. The main distinguishing factor between the active and inactive poor is therefore their capacity or opportunity to do something about their condition. This distinction can also carry negative value judgements and have moral, social or political implications. This can lead to the categorisation of the poor between the deserving, those who are poor due to no fault of their own and the undeserving, those whose poverty is due to character defects such as laziness, drunkenness and immorality (see Hossain, 2005, Lister, 2004).

2

Poverty and cash transfers in Malawi

Malawi's First and Second Integrated Household Surveys (1997/1998 and 2004/2005) show there has been very little change in the rate of poverty in Malawi since 1998. Malawi remains one of the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa,with 52.4% of the population poor and 22.3% 'ultra-poor', meaning that one in five people live in such dire poverty that they cannot even afford to meet the minimum food requirement.The ultra poor are those who suffer hunger during most of the year, are physically weak, have few or no assets, little or no land, tend to sell or consume their productive assets (livestock, tools, seeds), are female/child/elderly headed households and die from infections that others survive (NSO, 2005; Chinsinga, 2009). Malawi's per capita income has grown by only 0.2% a year over the last 30 years despite attempts by successive governments and donors to improve the lives of the poor.

In addition to high levels of poverty, Malawi faces several challenges, among them HIV/AIDS, chronic malnutrition, declining soil fertility, shortages of land and inadequate agricultural policies (Conroy, 2006; Action Aid, 2006). These challenges, which make the poor even more vulnerable, mean that for every 30% of the population that moves out of poverty, 30% of the non-poor become poor (Government of Malawi, 2006). The failure to address poverty and vulnerability successfully has made the implementation of a social protection policy necessary.

The social protection policy under which cash transfers are being implemented is not new in the policy-making discourse of Malawi. Since 1964, various social protection instruments have been implemented (see Table 1) but these have been uncoordinated and implemented as short-term safety nets.

Table 1: A summary of social protection policies in Malawi

Period	Types of Intervention
1964-1981	Input and output price controls Universal input subsidy Farmers' clubs and input credit facilities
1981-1990	Input and output price decontrols Phasing out of universal subsidies Targeted nutrition programmes Food transfers (relief)
1990-1994	Interventions under the Social Dimension of Adjustment, including credit schemes (Malawi Mudzi Fund) Targeted nutrition programmes and food transfers
1994- 2006	MSMEs credit scheme Public works programme, cash for work, food for work Input transfers (starter packs, targeted inputs) Food transfers (relief and other types) School meals Cash transfers (pilot) Targeted input subsidies Targeted nutrition programmes Integrated livelihood support
2006 - 2011	Social Protection Policy: social cash transfers and agricultural subsidies Non-contributory old age pensions (planned) Community development projects Public works programme Cash and food for work Capacity building for vulnerable and marginalised people (such as orphans, the elderly, those infected with HIV/AIDS)

Sources: Slater and Tsoka (2007) Malawi Social Protection Status Report, World Bank, p.21, (Between 1964 and 2006); Government of Malawi (2007) (Between 2006 – 2011).

The Government of Malawi's (GoM) motivation behind the current social protection policy is to move from safety-net programming to more long-term, predictable social protection that helps poor households deal with risks and disasters through a more institutionalised and coordinated approach. The goal is to ensure food security, raise household incomes and enhance productivity. Therefore, the social cash transfer is an unconditional programme that aims to alleviate poverty and vulnerability, increase school enrolment and attendance and invest in the health and nutritional status of the poor. It provides cash payments to families identified as ultra-poor and labour-constrained. Currently, the programme reaches 28,000 households but is projected to reach 300,000 households by the year 2015 (Covarrubias et al., 2012; Chinsinga, 2009).

The Cash Transfer (CT) programme in Malawi has been in pilot phase since it was launched in Mchinji in 2006, and this pilot (2012-2013) covers seven districts[8] out of twenty-eight districts across Malawi, reaching between 1% and 4% of the poor nationally. It is therefore not implemented nationally and only 2% of eligible households receive CTs.

Due to reliance on donor funding for CTs, their design has been largely influenced by donor preferences and agendas in the area of HIV/AIDS, orphans, vulnerable children and so on. In the current programme, at least two-thirds of the recipients are children and half are orphans. Generally, female/child and elderly-headed households make up the majority of those that have benefitted from the cash transfer programme (Chinsinga, 2009).

Therefore, being poor alone has not been an entitlement to a transfer. Instead transfers have tended to focus on a particular demographic. For instance, one objective of the Malawi Social Cash Transfer is to increase school enrolments, and so it offers increased payments to households with school-going children (McCord, 2009). The Malawi CT is considered unconditional, but education bonuses for school-going children make it at least partly conditional (Chinsinga, 2009).

Identifying and reaching eligible individuals and households has, in practice, been based on geographical location, although households are expected to meet two further criteria. Firstly, the household has to be ultra-poor; they can only afford one meal a day, are unable to purchase essential non-food items (such as clothes, soap and school materials) and have no reliable sources of income. Secondly, the household has to be labour constrained; having no able-bodied members fit for work between the ages of 19 and 64, or having an able-bodied member who has caring responsibilities for more than three dependants. Categorical selection has also been used. Issues of age and illness (such as HIV/AIDS) have been used to determine the ability of individuals and household to support themselves by paid work. Selection of recipients is done at the community level and the community is responsible for identifying households that fit the criteria (Chinsinga, 2009; Handa et al., 2012). [9]

The programme is designed to target 10% of the 'ultra poor', which falls well short of the overall level of 'ultra-poor', let alone those more generally in poverty. This kind of targeting fails to take into consideration the small economic differences among the overall percentage of the population who are poor in Malawi. This means that cash transfers can be divisive because there is very little difference between beneficiaries and the rest of their communities in well-being, lifestyles, access to assets and income and real consumption (Ellis, 2012; McCord, 2009; Chinsinga, 2009). A study by Miller et al. (2008) observed that cash transfer programmes in Malawi created jealousy and conflict within communities (see also Miller et al., 2010). As a result, some authors (Chinsinga 2009, Ellis and Maliro, 2013) have argued that exclusion and inclusion errors can be addressed through better categorical targeting such as child grants and pensions. [10]

Table 2: Level of cash transfer per month

Number of Household Members*	Malawi kwacha (MWK)	USD
1	600	4
2	1000	7
3	1,400	10
4	1,800	13

*Households with children attending primary school receive a MWK 200 bonus and those with children attending secondary school get a MWK 400 bonus.

8 Including Mchinji, these seven districts are Chitipa and Likoma in the northern region, Salima in the central region, Mangochi, Machinga and Phalombe in the Southern region.

9 For a detailed discussion of the selection process in Malawi, see Handa et al (2012, pp. 82-85).

10 Recent analysis for the World Bank highlights this as a challenge elsewhere. According to Ralston, 'Perhaps it is worth considering universal UCTs in specific geographical locations – for example, rural areas with a high proportion of the population below the poverty line – where the lower costs of universal transfers outweigh the benefits of more accurate targeting. There may also be a case for making transfers universal in fragile situations where any kind of targeting may exacerbate existing tensions' (Ralston, 2014).

Targeting also raises the issues of affordability and sustainability. The Malawi CT aims to provide the targeted 10% of the ultra poor with cash transfers that range from USD 4 - USD 13 per household, depending on size (see Table 2). Households with primary school children receive an extra USD 1.30 per month, with USD 2.60 for secondary school children (Chinsinga, 2009, Covarrubias et al., 2012). Currently, the programme covers only 24,000 of the eligible 296,000 households considered labour-constrained and ultra poor. Therefore, Malawi CTs only reach 8% of eligible households. This means the transfers only cover 2% of the 1.3 million poor households in Malawi (McCord, 2009).

Although the cash transfer programme is run by the Government of Malawi, it is largely financed by donors, mainly the Global Fund through the National AIDS Commission, with UNICEF providing significant support for capacity building. Besides providing salaries for both national and district government officers, there is little commitment from the GoM itself to finance the CTs. According to McCord (2009), in 2009/2010 the GoM contributed nothing towards the CTs and was only expected to start contributing to the CTs in the 2011/2012 financial year, and then only 12% of the yearly costs. Clearly the GoM will still need substantial external funding to finance CTs, and this raises issues of affordability, especially if the programmes were to be scaled up to cover all eligible households.

According to some researchers (Pal et al., 2005; Pearson et al., 2006; and Barrientos and Holmes, 2007), CTs should be affordable in low-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa with minimal support from donors. For example, it is suggested that the cost of an old age and invalidity pension should be less than 1.5% of GDP, and could be funded by 2033 from domestic resources (Pal et al., 2005). In addition, Pearson et al. (2006) argue, based on research conducted in seven African countries, that a transfer of USD 15 per household per month to the poorest 10% of the population would cost less than 1% of GDP. This is not the situation in Malawi where the cost of scaling up the current CT programme to reach 10% of eligible households would cost 1.7% of GDP and 4.2% of total government budget. Scaling up nationally would cost 2% to 7% of GDP. This would be an unsustainable drain on public funds if it were to come exclusively from domestic resources.

However, Farrington et al. (2007) question whether GDP is a useful measure for affordability. Taking as an example China's experience with the Minimum Living Standard Scheme and South Africa's Social Grants Scheme, the authors observe that each country's expenditure on these schemes and coverage is proportionate to its growth targets being met and the state of public finances. They therefore suggest the examination of national budgets, current revenues and expenditures as a better determinant of the affordability of CTs. This would raise questions about what is allocated, when, how and why. Choices would have to be made about which forms of social assistance could be replaced with CTs, or whether spending on CTs would require additional expenditure. Such decisions depend not only on affordability but on the acceptability of CTs to policy-makers.

The GoM's failure to allocate funds for CTs is thus not only a reflection of available resources but also of policy choice and political priorities. As McCord (2009:4) explains, 'limited sustainability of CTs is a result of binding fiscal constraints faced by countries with low domestic resource bases as well as a reluctance to carry out budgetary reprioritisation in favour of social protection provision'.

The development community should therefore be aware that acceptance of donor funds by governments does not equal a domestic fiscal commitment to CTs (McCord, 2009). For instance, in 2011, there was a delay in receiving funding from the Global Fund for the Malawi CTs due to the global financial crisis. As a result, beneficiaries did not receive their transfers for several months, bringing into serious question not only the sustainability of the CTs but also their ownership (Chikadza, 2011). As one respondent to a study by Chinsinga (2009: 16) observed: 'These financing glitches make it clear that this is not our programme, as the amounts involved are huge. One month's disbursement comes close to the annual expenditure for running the entire office of the District Commissioner, so much that reallocation of resources from other sources to cover up financing lags in CTs is simply not possible.'

Despite these affordability and sustainability issues, the Malawi CTs have had some positive impact. An impact evaluation by Covarrubias et al. (2012) found that the cash transfer programme in Malawi influences both household consumption choices and production decisions. Hence, recipients tend to use their money to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, educational materials and access to health services, as well as investing to improve shelter and to acquire agricultural tools and livestock (Farrington et al., 2007). According to Chinsinga (2009), CTs have led to improved nutrition and food security, increased local trading, increased school enrolments and attendance, improved household disposable income and greater social standing. Another study by Baird et al. (2011) demonstrated how unconditional cash transfers in Malawi had substantially lowered teenage marriage and pregnancy rates. One might expect widespread support among elites for CTs based on this evidence, but, as we show, evidence of positive impact is not producing support. The next section examines the perceptions and attitudes of elites towards poverty, the poor and pro-poor policy based on qualitative and quantitative analyses.

3

Elite attitudes towards the poor and cash transfers in Malawi

There is growing recognition in the development community that the implementation of policies in developing countries requires not more institutions, but better strategies that address the interests and attitudes of elites. Therefore, the role of attitudes has been studied to understand how they shape and impact the outcome of pro-poor policy (Hossain and Moore, 2001). Such attitudes reveal elites' ideas about 'how to mitigate or solve the problem of poverty, what constitutes poverty and what makes it a problem requiring remedy or solution' (Himmelfarb, 1984:7). These attitudes are politically significant because they may become a pre-policymaking tool that allows elites to prioritise policies towards some groups of poor people rather than others. For instance, support may be provided to groups of (poor) people considered economically active, thereby sidelining the chronic poor who might not be active (Hossain, 2005; Hickey, 2007).

This section discusses elite attitudes towards poverty, the poor and pro-poor policy in Malawi. It is divided into two parts: the first discusses elite attitudes towards poverty and vulnerability and their views on the causes of poverty; the second part discusses elite attitudes towards pro-poor policies with emphasis on cash transfers, to get a sense of whether or not elite attitudes support the development of a sustainable, long-term CT programme.

Elite attitudes towards poverty and the causes of poverty in Malawi

According to Government of Malawi Welfare Monitoring Surveys, poverty in Malawi decreased from 52.4% in 2004 to 50% in 2005, 40% in 2008 and to 39% in 2009 (Government of Malawi, 2009). Our respondents perceive poverty to be significantly higher than these statistics suggest: 42% of respondents considered that poverty affected over 70% of the population, while a similar percentage considered poverty to affect over 50% of the population. In total, 84% of respondents across the different categories believed that over 50% of the population are affected by poverty and only 10% of respondents considered poverty to affect less than 49% of the population. Some respondents indicated that poverty was as high as 90% (see Table 3), and many within the civil service indicated that 'to be politically correct', they would estimate poverty at a little over 50%, but if they were being frank, poverty was at least 65%.

As one high-ranking government official said: '*To be realistic, 70% of Malawians are poor.*' (Principal Secretary, Civil Service)

Table 3: Elite estimates of poverty in Malawi

Elite estimate of the proportion of poor in the population*	Elite n	%
70-100%	22	42
50-69%	22	42
40-49%	5	10
Missing Value	3	6
Number of interviewees	52	100%

*Derived from semi-structured interviews. Total Respondents = 52

These higher estimates of the levels of poverty in comparison with official statistics suggest high visibility of poverty. Elites spoke of being exposed to the realities of poverty on a daily basis. For example:

> '*In Malawi it is accepted and expected that if you travel 10 minutes out of the city, you will not have electricity, running water, sanitation, and that you will see children without clothes on their back or begging by the side of the road during school time. These things are not questioned; they are normal.*' (Advocacy Manager, INGO)

The concepts used by respondents to convey their ideas about poverty in Malawi seemed to be based on direct observation or interaction with the poor, rather than on conventional measures such as poverty lines or income. The respondents tended to describe poverty in terms similar to those in which the poor conveyed their own understanding of poverty (see Khaila et al., 2009), stressing the effect of factors such as lack of access to water, healthcare and education services on poor people's income, food security, literacy levels and general vulnerability. As one respondent indicated, poverty is '*kuvutika kwa kaya kaya*', meaning that even when resources are available, the poor have no bucket to fetch water in or cannot access free education because they have no clothes for their children: '*Only God knows how they survive.*' (Director, CSO)

In discussing the causes of poverty, respondents to the questionnaire primarily emphasised lack of economic growth, followed by low levels of education, lack of access to productive assets such as land and then behavioural causes, such as the character of the poor themselves and a lack of political will.

Table 4: Opinions among elites on the causes of poverty in Malawi

Category	Academic	CSO	Donor	Civil Service	Media	INGO	Political	Private Sector	Missing Value	Total
	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes
Insufficient economic development	0	50	67	27	37	40	41	100	0	57
Lack of political will to fight poverty	100	56	33	64	37	60	59	0	0	52
Corruption /patronage /clientelism	0	50	33	50	0	40	24	0	100	35
Lack of effort on the part of the poor	0	13	33	55	25	20	29	0	0	31
Monopolisation of op-portunities	0	25	27	45	13	20	24	0	0	28
Government failure to fulfil social obligations	0	31	27	36	0	20	24	0	0	26
Elites lack sensitivity towards the poor	0	13	7	41	13	20	18	0	0	20

Data derived from questionnaires. Total respondents = 86. All the percentages for each category are calculated based on the total number of inter-viewees in each category.

Considering whether the poor were to blame for their own poverty, respondents pointed out that there were no 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. Instead, elites adopted a 'culture of poverty' perspective to explain how the poor might have some responsibility for their own poverty. They placed emphasis on poor people's fatalistic attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that led them to view their poverty as fate, making them less economically viable in society.

Firstly, the mindset of the poor was widely considered to be a hindrance to development and personal improvement. Not only do these attitudes determine behaviour, but they are believed to separate the poor from the non-poor. The attitudes of the poor towards savings, identifying opportunities and work were considered by some respondents to be more negative than the attitudes of the non-poor.

The mindset of the poor was perceived by some respondents to determine the likelihood of someone getting up and working hard or being idle. In this sense, inequality was justified on the basis that it is difficult to uplift all poor people, because they are all perceived to have different priorities and ambitions. A top official in the civil service stated that:

> *'Although in the rural areas there are few opportunities, a man can go into the river or stream nearby and get some bamboo shoots to make baskets or sleeping mats and sell in town or go to the forest, cut down some trees, make a hoe and sell it. On the other hand, he can tell his wife that together they should collect water and soil to mould bricks for sale. These are all activities that can bring some income into the family, but for some reason there is no incentive for the poor to work hard and uplift themselves out of poverty. They just wake up in the morning and sit all day playing one game after the other and they do nothing productive. There is lack of drive to improve oneself and there is need to deal with our people's mind set.'* (Principal Secretary)

Table 5: Elite perceptions of the main (structural and behavioural) causes of poverty in Malawi

Category	Academic	CSO	Donor/ INGO	Civil Ser-vice	Media	Political	Private Sector
Structural Causes (%)							
Lack of democratisation	0	55	50	8	0	10	33
Lack of education	100	64	50	75	71	60	67
Global factors (unfair terms of trade, market prices, aid)	0	36	25	25	0	20	67
Overpopulation	0	0	0	8	0	50	33
Weak private sector	100	9	0	33	0	10	0
Malawi's landlocked nature /high transport costs	0	9	0	8	0	10	33
Lack of resources (land, money)	100	55	25	33	29	50	33
Lack of economic growth	100	36	50	42	43	40	0
Unequal power relations and inequality	0	64	50	8	0	0	33
Unemployment	0	9	0	0	14	20	0
Behavioural Causes (%)							
Behaviour and attitudes of the poor	100	64	36	50	71	100	100
Religion	0	0	13	17	0	0	0
Lack of entrepreneurial spirit	0	0	0	8	0	0	100
Lack of political will	0	55	25	50	57	50	0
Lack of visionary leaders	0	9	0	0	0	20	0
Behaviour of the elite (patronage and populist politics, corruption)	100	9	36	42	14	30	33

Data derived from face-to-face interviews with elites. More than one response possible. All the percentages for each category are calculated based on the total number of interviewees in each category.

The idea of changing mindsets was taken up by several respondents. One argued, for example, that 'Malawi is predominantly an agricultural country and if you are lazy and cannot work on your land then you will not eat. It is as simple as that.' (CEO, private sector)

In situations where the poor have worked on their land and have produced, they were believed to squander this opportunity by failing to invest their earnings, or else they invest in unproductive areas:

> *'Some people even make money from growing of tobacco but they will decide to marry another wife rather than building a house with the proper roofing. Those that work in our houses choose to use their money on beer instead of buying a bag of fertiliser that would help them in the planting season. It is the way they use the meagre resources they earn, it is usually on unproductive activities.'* (Principal Secretary)

Some respondents argued that the poor have developed a culture of dependency or overreliance on handouts that makes them unable to seek solutions for their own poverty. In the past under President Banda,[11] it was claimed that the poor were self-sufficient; although they relied on the non-poor in urban areas, the relationship was reciprocal. Respondents expressed nostalgia for 'the old times' when they took second hand clothes to relatives in the rural areas in exchange for food, which was plentiful then. Respondents expressed widespread belief that this reciprocal relationship, based on a culture of self-sufficiency, has been replaced by a belief among the poor that someone else will take care and provide for them.

11 Kamuzu Banda was the first President of Malawi following its independence in 1964, ruling an authoritarian government for thirty years.

> *'That mentality that donors and government will help us reduces the zeal to work hard, and they sit idle waiting for handouts or they start to beg. People no longer ask for help but for alms.'* (MP) '

> *'People think manna will fall from heaven. People cannot think of what to do to escape poverty.'* (Principal Secretary)

A National Coordinator for an agricultural CSO told the story of a study that his organisation carried out on food and nutrition. They found that the poor would like to remain poor to continue receiving aid: '*They know that if they do not work someone will come to help them. Some of the poor are satisfied with poverty levels; therefore they cannot break out of the poverty cycle*.'

One respondent said:

> *'Malawians have shifted their interest in ethical work and responsible and accountable living to an attitude of 'tidye nawo' [reaping where they have not sown] or to support those in power to benefit financially. We are unable to question how a member of parliament can manage to have five vehicles, buy houses or run businesses on their salaries. The poor are only thinking 'give me today my daily bread' and do not think about tomorrow. When people are trapped in a system of hand to mouth, they cannot think beyond that.'* (National Coordinator, CSO)

Lastly, the respondents argued that the poor consider poverty as their fate and that it is 'holy', and they are therefore resigned to their fate. The poor were seen to be using their situation as an excuse not to be industrious or involved in development projects such as food-for-work programmes.

> *'People need to be preoccupied with creating worth and how to improve one's life. But they are busy living day-to-day arguing that "my parents were poor so I will also end up poor no matter what I try". There is no generational improvement; the parents of today are still living in the thatched roofed house just like their predecessors.'*
> (Principal Secretary)

Religion was considered the main contributor to this thinking, with some respondents pointing to the Bible, and particularly the verse that says 'it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God' (Matthew 19:24, UK NIV).

One respondent claimed that the poor: '*tend to think there is something holy about being poor, that we start coming up with anecdotes that depict the rich as not worthy of entering the kingdom of God. Somehow if you are in the village people sneer at the well-to-do and there is a consensus that we should not laugh at poor people. But is it not the wish of the poor to be food self-sufficient?*'. (Principal Secretary)

This emphasis on a 'culture of poverty' raises concerns among respondents about the fairness of targeted cash transfers, a theme that came up often in the interviews and in observation. Respondents expressed views on inequality that do not reflect any sort of radical egalitarian values – or even a milder doctrine, such as equality in initial socio-economic conditions (Reis, 2005:43). Indeed, a majority of the respondents argued against the use of the term *equality*, preferring instead the term *equity*. This emphasis on equity rather than equality led to a preference for allocation of resources based on fitness or, using the parlance first popularised by Charles Booth in late nineteenth century Britain, whether the poor are 'deserving' or 'undeserving'. It also relates to the views expressed during interviews that most Malawians are poor, including some members of the elite themselves. Determining who is poor in a country where there is widespread poverty becomes difficult (see Ralston, 2014).[12]

> *'Inequality is a concept that can easily be misunderstood and is highly unacceptable amongst the poor because they have to acknowledge inequalities within their own communities. In receiving development assistance, the poor prefer to say that they are all poor within particular locations. Inequality is a concept that cannot be easily translated into our language. People understand the word 'umphawi' to mean poverty, but to make them understand inequality one would have to tell a story.'* (Principal Secretary, Civil Service)

Consequently, inequity is considered a better term than inequality as it exposes issues of justice and fairness: essentially, '*inequality is not wrong but inequity is wrong*'. (Managing Director, CSO)

These views explain why respondents, despite citing a wide range of causes for poverty, indicated that the most important cause of poverty is what respondents described as 'the character of the poor'. Equality, some respondents argued, depends upon hard work, providence and the ability to discern opportunities. As we will see in the second part of this section, respondents were sceptical about whether or not the poor are able to 'do their part' in this, so to speak.

12 Being a member of the 'elite' does not necessary guarantee wealth in Malawi, or indeed in many very poor countries. This category includes, for example, academics, religious leaders, leaders of CSOs and so on who may earn salaries that are relatively higher than many others, but are still not high enough to provide a comfortable level of security. A sense of fear permeates many of the interview transcripts – that one illness, one HIV/AIDS diagnosis, one withdrawal of donor funding, was all that separated some of our elites from being poor themselves, or returning to the poverty from which they, or their families, came.

Elite attitudes towards pro-poor policies

Respondents suggested that they generally preferred policies that would have wider benefits to society, rather than ones focusing specifically on the poor; thus there was more support for economic growth as a means of reducing poverty and for policies that minimised direct redistribution. Respondents favoured policies that would improve human capital for economic growth, such as education or health, and also those policies that would reduce the scope for the poor to become dependent on assistance, such as agricultural subsidies and micro finance. There was very little support for policies such as cash transfers or even old age pensions that respondents believed would lead to laziness or dependency. This held true across all categories, except donor/INGOs.

The respondents' policy choices reveal a link back to their views of the causes of poverty. Since poverty was viewed as a problem of insufficient growth, the solutions 'are medium-to-long-term with no real expectation of immediate impacts on the well-being of the poor, and are focused on fostering self-reliance at some future unspecified time rather than on guaranteeing minimum levels of well-being in the present' (Hossain, 2003: 76). Poverty was not seen as a matter of urgency or priority, but rather one linked to the need for national development.

Consequently, with poverty considered deep and severe, and with varied causes, the promotion of economic growth is seen as the cure. Preferred targeted interventions to address poverty are those that contribute directly to economic growth, such as education and fertiliser subsidies, rather than raising taxes to spend on social policies or cash transfers. Economic growth is seen to provide the opportunities that make it possible for the educated poor to contribute and participate, and from which they can benefit. Most respondents argued that previous prioritisation of exclusively pro-poor policies had failed, further emphasising the importance of growth for poverty reduction. This is why strategies aimed at direct intervention in poverty are side-lined or disappear (Toye, 1999:8).

Although some respondents questioned the efficacy of growth, given problems of resource accumulation and how wealth generated by growth might be distributed towards the poor, the dominant view across respondents was that growth is better for reducing poverty in the long term. Respondents appear less inclined to support redistribution policies, such as increasing income tax, cash transfers and food distribution (see Table 6).

Table 6: Views on the viability and desirability of particular social policies

	Viable and desirable	Desirable but not viable	Viable but not desirable	Neither viable nor desirable
	%	%	%	%
Micro finance	77	10	5	8
Public works programme	71	14	10	5
Free and universal primary education	70	27	1	2
Fertiliser subsidies	59	33	3	5
Free and universal primary health services	59	35	2	5
National safety nets programme	48	27	15	10
Old age pensions	43	36	7	14
Cash transfers/direct welfare transfers	31	34	14	21
Popular housing programmes	30	50	2	18
Child benefits	29	17	2	52
Free university education	21	51	5	23
Minimum income for different age groups	21	35	7	37
Food distribution programmes	20	40	16	24
Unemployment insurance	15	38	13	34

Data derived from questionnaires. Total respondents = 86. The shaded areas show the strategies picked by more than 50% of the 86 respondents who filled in a questionnaire

A more sustainable approach to reducing poverty, according to an overwhelming majority of the respondents, is education. It is viewed as a cure for all the causes of poverty in Malawi. Elites believe that low educational attainment is the reason for high poverty levels and explains why society has not developed the attitudes and values that are perceived to be conducive to implementation of pro-poor policies and the skills to enhance productivity.

> '*Education is the key as it impacts on the attitudes of the poor. If all people were educated then they would have a positive attitude towards development.*' (Principal Secretary)

What an education does is '*to make you see doors where there are no doors or to sense opportunities*.' (Academic)

To most respondents, education is what separates the 'haves' from the 'have-nots' and it widens the gap between elites and the poor. Elites believe that *'as the education gap gets wider that in itself creates a barrier between elites and the poor, and there are certain things that cannot be communicated to the uneducated poor than to someone who is educated.'* (Managing Director, CSO)

The fact that many members of Malawian elites have themselves emerged from rural poverty through education was seen as an example of the possibilities that education opens up. Therefore '*if one is not educated it is more or less that you have made a decision of which grouping in society you are going to belong to*.' (National Coordinator, CSO).

Illiteracy has meant lack of technological advances that could have helped Malawi increase its agricultural production: '*The use of the hoe also takes people's time. A person will be digging the whole day on a small piece of land when we could have been using other methods*' (Principal Secretary).

Economically speaking, a lack of education is seen as contributing to the lack of development in the private sector, as illiterate people are believed to be unable to run successful businesses. Therefore, a lack of literacy leads to a lack of productivity and does not contribute to economic growth. Some respondents drew a rather surprising link between high levels of illiteracy and funding spent on sensitisation or information dissemination to create public awareness and understanding.

This was considered a waste of time and resources; as a respondent within economic planning and development said: '*You find that we are still teaching people how to apply fertiliser when we have been doing this since 1964*.' (Principal Secretary)

Some respondents related illiteracy to the failure to democratise. They argue that illiteracy has perpetuated 'personality politics', where political parties are not based on any ideology but rather aim to appeal to supporters through patronage. As a Principal Secretary argued: '*If the population was fairly literate, then we would be electing members of parliament based on what they can offer Malawians and the strength of their policies, and be able to hold them to account*.'

A CSO leader blamed increasing corruption on illiteracy, arguing that it is because of lack of education that poor Malawians allow corruption to thrive. In this sense, the poor were blamed in part, at least by some respondents, not just for their own poverty but also for Malawi's low quality of governance.

Inherent in this discussion on education is an attempt by elites to blame the poor, at least in part, for the presence of poverty. For example:

> '*Most poor people who are not educated just fold their hands and do nothing all day, they are resigned to their fate. If a person is educated they are ambitious to progress and do things better. You work hard to equal those at your level and education makes you think wider. There are those who can develop without education but they are not many*.' (Country Director, INGO)

Table 6 lists respondents' views on the viability and desirability of particular strategies for poverty reduction. It reveals that the strategies considered viable and desirable are those that target the 'active' poor such as fertiliser subsidies (59%), public works (71%) and micro finance programmes (77%). Other strategies such as free and universal education (70%) and health care (59%), respondents argue, create a population that can contribute towards economic growth.

In comparison, other social protection strategies such as cash transfers (31%), child benefits (29%), unemployment insurance (15%) and old age pensions (48%) are considered viable and desirable by fewer than 50% of the respondents. While not asked to choose one approach over another, given limited resources, it is clear that CTs are likely to be given lower priority than other types of interventions. The respondents' views about the causes of poverty seem to shape their attitudes towards the cash transfers in a manner that demonstrates their preference for the economically 'active' over the 'inactive' poor.

Explanations for respondents' attitudes, gathered during interviews, are that cash transfers target the less industrious and 'inactive' poor. The respondents' ideas about the poor (that they are uneducated, passive, dependent, and have a fatalistic mentality) provided a sense of moral grounding for policies that respondents consider target the active rather than the inactive poor. During non-participant observation of a social protection workshop designed to discuss the cash transfer initiative, participants clearly indicated their opposition to the cash transfer component of the social protection policy. Comments included:

> '*Let us inject funds towards the energetic poor*.'
>
> '*The poor bring poverty on themselves, for instance they will sell their subsidised fertiliser coupons and sit in the bar to drink.*'

> '*Let us put money on poor, energetic and sober Malawians. Let us not put money on mad and useless people*.'

> '*We should be concentrating on production to build the country rather than these (cash transfers) handouts*.'

> '*Social Protection Policy will destroy the ethics of working hard*.'

These views have moral, social and political implications which are not unfamiliar to current public policy discourses in many developed countries.

- Firstly, there is the assumption that opportunities are available to the poor, and if they only worked hard enough, they could overcome their poverty; thus, if one is poor then it must be deserved.
- Secondly, some participants assumed that most government action will not have the desired impact on the poor, because the poor simply do not work hard enough.
- Lastly, strategies that target the poor who are willing to work hard to get out of poverty may find greater support, while the less 'industrious' poor may actually have greater need for assistance.

Consequently, if elites believe that strategies such as cash transfers lead to dependence amongst the poor and reduce the incentive to work hard, then they may prefer to withdraw support or at least to implement such strategies so that they do not reach the less 'deserving'.

As a media leader said: '*If you keep giving the poor programmes that involve giving cash, food or subsidies, you end up breaking the hardworking nature of Malawians. At the end of the day we will achieve laziness. People will get used and become dependent on handouts*.'

A prominent leader within the private sector said: '*We need to be assisting people with producing crops or starting a business. It is better than cash transfers, especially these universal pensions even for people who have not been working, [which] are laughable. How and who is going to pay for these pensions?*'

It was common for respondents to argue that sometimes, no matter what government does to reduce poverty, the poor do not work hard; therefore, it is important to choose between cash for work programmes, cash transfers, pensions or food for work programmes. Respondents suggested that cash transfers were 'handouts' that create dependency and target an unproductive sector. They expressed concern that it would be difficult to raise taxes to accommodate cash transfers or the social protection policy in general.

> '*Yes, I am my brother's keeper, but the poor also have a responsibility towards poverty reduction. I am not saying all poor people are lazy.*' (MP)[13]

In the interviews, public works triumphed over cash transfers: public works programmes were said to encourage hard work, while cash transfers encourage laziness and lack of planning by the poor.

One respondent explained:

> *'Public works programmes are good because they ensure ownership, especially because you are doing things that improve your own area, such as roads. The money earned can be used to buy food and farming inputs. We had received some funding of EUR 1.1 million from the EU during the food crisis of 2005, and one of the conditions was that those that are hungry but able to work were given public works to get food. These were asked to make manure, cultivate their land and they would receive some seeds. That is assisting that person to get food in the short term but also in the long term. With cash transfers someone can decide not to take a bath for three days, puts on torn clothes, comes and present themselves as poor to receive this money and do so the following month as long as the project is there. This is not sustainable and bleeds laziness. When someone gives you money you have not planned for, you can't think of what you want to do with that money.'* (Religious CSO)

This was echoed by several respondents, for example: '*We cannot be giving the poor free food and expect them to graduate out of poverty, but we must give them opportunities to become productive members of society.*' (National Director, CSO)

The solution therefore is to '*teach people to fish rather than giving them fish*', (MP); because otherwise '*cash transfers are like manna from heaven*'. (Media)

13 An interesting trend in many of the interviews was this 'backtracking' to make the response more palatable to a (presumably liberal) Western audience. In the same vein, during a Masters level module on 'Development Politics' at the University of Birmingham, we led discussions on attitudes to poverty in a way that reduced social desirability bias, allowing for complete anonymity in class discussions in response to the question, 'Please list the top 3 reasons why people are poor, in your opinion'. This is because we noted that when we asked people to identify themselves, no one ever said 'because the poor are lazy', but when we allowed responses to be anonymous, several people said this. Interestingly, the most vociferous defenders of the poor against this characterisation were European students who had grown up with strong welfare states and where certain norms around protecting the vulnerable have been inculcated over many years.

4

Elite attitudes, sustainability of cash transfers and the challenges of policy transfer

Discussions about cash transfer sustainability in Malawi and many sub-Saharan African countries have emphasised the host country's ability to finance the programme (see Chinsinga, 2009, Chikadza, 2011, and McCord, 2009). Little effort has been made to understand the deeply entrenched attitudes towards social assistance. As Graham (2002:38) argues, 'attitudes about the causes of poverty, about the distribution of opportunities, and about redistribution, are not only key to the choice of programs, but are likely to influence the design and future direction of policies'. In a country like Malawi, whose budget is largely donor-funded, and where various programmes are competing for scarce resources, attitudes about who is deserving or undeserving of assistance become even more important.

Since Malawi's cash transfer programme is still in its pilot phase and is externally funded, these attitudes might not be of immediate concern. However, if it is to move beyond this pilot phase and become a national programme, these attitudes must be seriously considered. As Graham (2002:29) argues, 'Resolving these issues will ultimately be key for developing countries to move from temporary and usually externally financed social assistance strategies to social welfare structures which are part of a domestically financed social contract. Such that, dismissing or neglecting deeply entrenched attitudes is likely to result in unsustainable programs'.

Currently in Malawi, there is a discrepancy between the government's acceptance of the cash transfer pilot and its willingness to allocate its own budget towards it. McCord's (2009) analysis of Malawi's domestic allocations towards cash transfers indicates that these are not a policy priority. She argues that cash transfers are not sustainable domestically without a major shift in domestic budget priorities.

There are several concerns revealed by elite attitudes that are likely to have an impact on the sustainability of cash transfers in Malawi.

Firstly, the use of a 'culture of poverty' perspective to establish the character of the poor determines policy trajectories and offers justification for supporting some groups of poor people over others, and it also influences decisions on competing policies. It implies that poverty is believed to be inherent in the character of the poor; as a result, the preferred policy solution is one of education or other strategies that break down this 'character'. Therefore, elites agree on supporting those able to work and help themselves, but there is less support for those unable to help themselves.

Secondly, even among national-level 'allies' of the poor, such as CSOs and religious organisations, elites believe that cash transfers represent consumption rather than investment, supporting the 'inactive' poor. Consequently, redistributive policies such as cash transfers are considered to be handouts that lead to laziness and dependency. As a result, elites support policies that target the 'active' poor. Policies that appeal to elites across all categories, with the exception of INGOs/donors, appear to be those that address broader development challenges and thus benefit the entire nation, rather than those that address individual poverty.

Finally, respondents consider CTs to be an additional investment that would require a substantial increase in funding were they to be scaled up. If they were to be funded from the national budget, respondents would not be willing to increase taxes to pay for CTs. Elites argue that poverty is so widespread that most Malawians can be considered poor, including many members of the elites themselves. If assistance was to be only for the 'ultra poor' – perceived by others as the 'inactive' poor – then this was perceived to be unfair.

The issues identified by this research raise questions as to the efficacy of transferring policies that are context-specific without due consideration of the new political context.

Many of the cash transfer programmes in sub-Saharan Africa have been implemented in the light of the positive experience of Latin America with similar programmes. However, the political, social, and economic context of Latin America is very different to that of sub-Saharan Africa, and this may mean that lessons learned in Latin America may not be directly applicable to countries like Malawi.

Firstly, there is a greater level of risk and vulnerability in many sub-Saharan Africa countries exacerbated by the spread of HIV/AIDS. This means that official poverty statistics miss out on how vulnerable many 'elite' households are, and how close to being poor the non-poor are.

Secondly, the capacity of national governments to design and implement CTs is weaker in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and certainly in Malawi CT implementation is hindered by the government's poor provision of health and education services that might complement CTs.

Thirdly, while the Latin American transfer programmes are not reliant on external funding, programmes in sub-Saharan Africa are almost always reliant on donor funds. Latin American countries have thus had more autonomy in determining the shape of their CTs, whereas CTs in Africa have been promoted and shaped by donors, reducing government ownership and control over policy (Graham, 2002; Davis et al., 2012). As a result, CTs in Africa may not reflect local priorities and appear to be short-term compared to the domestically-funded CTs in Latin America that are longer-term in nature. The unique political, social and economic context of sub-Saharan Africa shapes the design and implementation of CTs.

Although there are lessons to learn from the experience of Latin America with CTs, this should not preclude the fact that the political, social and economic contexts are different. Ignoring the context might conceal important questions about appropriateness, affordability and sustainability. Our research reaffirms the importance of using political analysis to ensure the sustainability of cash transfer programmes. It confirms the importance of local ownership for politically viable programming.

Another outcome of the research is to bring to the fore the role that elite attitudes play in decision-making about the allocation of scarce resources and priorities. These attitudes will become even more important if Malawi attempts to move from piloting a cash transfer programme that is largely donor-funded to a domestically funded national programme, especially when Malawi's fiscal constraints are taken into consideration.[14]

Our research shows that there is preference for productive forms of social protection, such as input subsidies or public works that support the 'active' poor, and policy strategies that enable the poor to become economically active. Generally, elite respondents believe that the poor should be assisted to help themselves and that policies should aim to address broader economic challenges.

These types of attitudes have not been researched in many African countries, to the best of our knowledge, but it is clear that these attitudes may structure the design and implementation of cash transfers. Although attitudes might change over time, of course, strategies for implementing reform must include navigating the constraints posed by public opinion and attitudes, as well as recognising windows of opportunity (Graham, 2002: 29).

14 The GoM intends to scale the CT programme up to cover 296, 000 households by 2014 (McCord, 2009) and 300,000 households by 2015 (Covarrubias et al, 2012). There is currently no indication that the government will stop relying on donor funds to implement this programme; however, there is a move to start funding the CTs through the national budget but it is not yet clear when this may start.

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