

Article

The political dynamics of the adoption and extension of child support grants¹

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Abstract

This paper examines the origins of the post-1994 social grants programme with a special focus on child support grants. The right to social security is one of the socio-economic rights guaranteed in the South African Constitution, which establishes a justiciable social contract whereby the state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of each of these rights. Social grants are allocated to pensioners, to parents for child support, and to people suffering from specified disabilities. More than ten million people in a population of 52 million currently receive grants and data suggests it has become a mechanism for fiscal redistribution, and has made a difference to the health status and well-being in poor families. Much of this has been achieved by locating beneficiaries of programmes introduced some years ago but there has also been an extension of grants to new beneficiaries.

Political actors may introduce new policies or change old ones, but the decisions will be influenced by already existing policies as well as the broader political and economic context. Based on interviews with key stakeholders who advocated for the child support grant, this study is anchored in an understanding of complex political forces which shape policies within a particular context. The political actors who championed this social policy were confronted by many challenges yet grants survive despite the fact that they are regularly belittled by journalists, academics and much of the middle class.

Introduction

Perhaps the most important social policy initiative of South Africa's democratic era was the product not of a grand battle fought in public, but of a quiet one of which only a small group of insiders were aware. In fact, the change went unnoticed until long after it had happened.

The extension of at least 16.8 million social grants (SASSA 2015) to around ten million people went unnoticed (*Mail&Guardian* October 9, 2015). The grants have had a significantly positive effect on the incomes of the poor (Bhorat and Cassim 2014) and have also stimulated economic activity in areas which were once destitute. It may well be post-1994 South Africa's most effective anti-poverty programme. The programme was a product of an alliance between individuals within the government and a small group of academic specialists and activists whose hand was later strengthened by a campaign led by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu). Equally important, the grants programme began not with pressure for a universal social grant system but with lobbying for a grant for children only.

This paper discusses some of the political dynamics which prompted the introduction of the child support grant during the 1990s, its extension into a broader grants programme as well as the impact on its recipients.

Setting the context

The interventions which enabled the extension of grants would not have been possible without a context in which the values which underpin social security were at least nominally supported by the society's post-1994 elite.

Social policy interventions assume that the well-being of society is enhanced by ensuring that prosperity is shared through redistributive actions which reduce poverty and multiple inequalities, especially their gendered forms (Antonopoulos 2013). Social policy includes the provision of basic services – in the main education and health care, but also water and sanitation in low income countries and social protection which aim to reduce vulnerability and promote individual, household and community protection against economic shocks (Barrientos and Pellisory 2012: 3, Holmes and Jones 2013). Social protection plays an important role in smoothing income and consumption but increasingly is expected to tackle the factors that cause persistent poverty and vulnerability.

For a variety of reasons, state policy endeavours which centre on fighting poverty, inequality and powerlessness in the middle income countries of the global South have been borrowed from the industrialised North. Originally, the dominant social policy intervention in the South in response to personal disaster was to implement safety nets as a stop-gap but, once these measures were removed, the underlying reasons for vulnerability persisted. The global crisis of 2007 showed that integrated social protection systems provided

more timely and effective responses. The focus of social security policies shifted to social assistance, investing in long-term integrated large-scale population coverage interventions. This is considered a more viable vehicle for redress of poverty and gender inequality (Antonopoulos 2013). South Africa's social security programme, which is comparatively extensive and includes social grants, unemployment insurance, and public works programmes (Holmes and Jones 2013), and is underpinned by very strong formal commitments to gender equality, is thus consistent with current trends in the South. Although the South African programme was a response to local dynamics rather than international trends as it precedes the 2007 crisis – it began relatively soon after democracy's advent in 1994.

The right to social security is one of several socio-economic rights guaranteed in the South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996). Section 27(1) (c) declares: '*Everyone has the right to have access to [...] social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependents, appropriate social assistance*'. Some policymakers and scholars view extending social security, therefore, as a constitutional obligation (Lund 2008, Patel et al 2012). The inclusion of an extensive Bill of Rights in chapter two resulted in the Constitution being heralded as one of the most progressive in the world. The Bill's socio-economic rights, including the right to social security, are not meant to be realised immediately – according to the Constitution, the state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of each of these rights. But the inclusion of a right to social security in a constitution is novel: it was the product of a context which made social security programmes possible.

The founding of democracy in 1994 was meant to create a society which did not perpetuate apartheid's inequalities. This produced, at least for a time, a climate conducive to tackling not only racial inequality but also its gender and class varieties: change could be justified as a contribution to redressing the legacies of apartheid. Racial inequalities were a particular target of the new government. Apartheid had provided a relatively generous welfare state for white people from which the black majority was excluded. This meant that social security measures were already in place; those who pressed for them to be extended to all citizens were not asking for an entirely new set of programmes. It also meant that change could be presented as a means for undoing apartheid by extending to the majority what was once barred to it by racial laws. Maintaining whites-only entitlements was

obviously indefensible, but ending them rather than extending them would deny to the majority what the minority had once enjoyed and could therefore be labelled a retreat from the post-apartheid project. And so it became possible for relatively few people, without much organised support in the society, to argue that extending social security for all was a sign of decisive movement away from apartheid.

Origins of social grants in South Africa

Race-based social grants were promulgated to meet the needs of the white minority which, at the start of the twentieth century, was confronting the impact of industrialisation. White poverty became a social problem in the 1890s, especially in the Cape and Transvaal.² The plight of Afrikaners, driven off the land and into wage labour, received particular attention from the Pact government of 1924. Soon after assuming power, it introduced 'affirmative action style' legislation which reflected aspects of occupational insurance and social assistance (Visser 2004: 2). It served as an artificial bolster for white labour and as an attempt to address the 'poor white problem'. Concentrated state programmes were devised to create work opportunities and in 1924 a state Department of Labour was created with the express object of finding work for the unemployed. Legislators aimed to build a stable white working-class, as it was not uncommon to find whites who were driven into wage labour, living a lifestyle similar to that of African wage labourers which the dominant racism of the time could not countenance (Grosskopf et al 1932).

There was some social security for the black majority during the twentieth century, although white interests dominated. The introduction of social security for the elderly began with the Old Age Pensions Act of 1928, which provided income protection for the white elderly (Patel 2013: 202, ODI 2005). According to Patel (Personal communication, November 7, 2013), this was the beginning of organised state intervention in social welfare. The first welfare department was established in 1937. In the same year a disability grant was introduced for white people, while in the late 1930s and 1940s, the social security system was extended more broadly, but with racially differentiated benefit levels for persons not classified white. The Unemployment Insurance Act (1928) was introduced during the depression years for white males. This gendered approach was reversed in 1946 when unemployment insurance was extended to white women workers.

How social security policy was skewed in favour of whites on the eve of democracy is illustrated in Table 1:

Table 1: Change in social security policy in South Africa

| Year | Change in social security policy in South Africa |
|-------------|--|
| 1928 | Introduced non-contributory social pensions for white and coloured people, not covered by occupational retirement insurance (subject to age criteria and means test) ³ |
| 1936 | The Blind Persons Act was approved |
| 1937 | Department of Social Welfare was established. Grants for the blind and the disabled were introduced, restricted to white and coloured people only (See 1946 legislation) |
| 1941 | Implemented pensions for war veterans; excluded black people |
| 1943 | Take-up of social assistance: white people – 40 per cent; coloured people – 56 per cent; Africans – 4 per cent |
| 1944 | Social old-age pension and pensions to the blind extended to African people, but benefit levels were less than a tenth of that of white people and they had a separate, much more rigid means test |
| 1946 | Disability grants extended to the other race groups |
| 1947 | Implemented family allowances for large and poor households; excluded African people |
| 1956 | Pensions Funds Act established and seen as a milestone in regulation of pensions. Again lower skilled workers were excluded from provision, leaving black people without assistance |
| 1958 | Africans received 60 per cent of the old-age pensions; however, spending on their pensions only amounted to 19 per cent of total spending on old-age grants |
| Early 1970s | Secondary industrialisation caused black workers to be included in the industry, and occupational insurance expanded to less skilled workers |
| 1972 | Social security entered a new trend of re-incorporation and reduced inequality amongst black population |
| 1978 | African people contributed to 70 per cent of all pensioners in the country and received 43 per cent of old-age pension budget |
| Late 1970s | The principle of equality in social spending levels was accepted |
| 1990 | African people receive 67 per cent of pensions |
| 1993 | Pension equality was attained and discrimination in terms of the means test eliminated (gender discrimination still persisted) |

(Adapted from Haasbroek 2009: 18)

The apartheid state (1948 to late 1990s) continued state social assistance for white people. Although it was eventually expanded to cover all citizens, payments were racially discriminatory. However, as apartheid faced pressure, reforms of the system from the late 1970s created the space for significant upward shifts in pensions for black people which, in turn, had a marked effect on incomes. Despite the reforms, then, social security’s role was largely to address white poverty, leaving the black majority to fend for itself.

The formulation and enactment of the Child Support Grant

The State Maintenance Grant (SMG) introduced in the 1930s was a product of the system described here. It addressed the poor white problem by providing financial assistance to mothers (and later fathers) and their children where the spouse was no longer present due to death, imprisonment or a number of other specified reasons (Budlender et al 2008). The SMG model was based on a nuclear family where the man was the household head; it included amounts for the children and for the caregiver. While this model benefitted the white, coloured and Indian population, the migrant labour system and apartheid policies caused severe disruption to the family form in the African community. There were also differences in the provision of grant payments between the bantustan regimes⁴ and white South Africa, and within the bantustan regimes themselves (Lund 1992). Therefore, the SMG did not target the poorest children equitably: apart from white recipients, it went largely to poor coloured and Indian women and their children, with little allocation to poor black women and their children.

The skewed nature of the SMG allocation in 1990 is illustrated in Table 2 below:

Table 2: State Maintenance Grant allocations

| |
|--|
| <i>8 out of 1000 children aged 0 – 17 years benefitted from the grant.</i> |
| <i>48 per 1000 for coloured children</i> |
| <i>40 per 1000 for Indian children (as members of a small population)</i> |
| <i>2 per 1000 for African children (as members of the largest population in SA)</i> |
| <i>15 per 1000 for white children because majority of potential recipients earned above the means test</i> |

Budlender et al (2008)

Because it remained grossly discriminatory when compared to pensions, which had been racially equalised by the 1980s, the SMG was an obvious target for reformers, in particular Leila Patel, appointed director general (DG) of the Department of Welfare and Population Development in 1994. While Patel was a leading activist in the fight against apartheid, the minister she served, Abe Williams, was a member of the National Party, which presided over apartheid. This seemed to make reform unlikely. But Williams was willing to support Patel's interest in extending social security probably. This may have been because his political background – he had been a member of the 'coloured' House of Representatives which had been sustained by patronage politics – alerted him to grant programmes' potential for building a political client base. Williams, one study notes, understood the political leverage to be gained from the SMG better than the new ANC provincial welfare ministers (Lund 2008: 21). The cabinet was presumably willing to support change because the SMG was so clearly discriminatory.

Patel thus established, in 1995, the Lund Committee for Child and Family Support, under the leadership of Francie Lund, an academic specialist in the area with a history of opposition to apartheid. It was mandated to develop a grant that would reach significantly more poor families than the SMG. Support for reform within the government was, however, limited by fiscal constraints. In the mid-1990s, approximately R1.2 billion was allocated for the SMG in the government budget. If it was extended equitably to the entire population, it would cost around R12 billion per year – in the mid-1990s, equivalent to the amount spent on all other pensions and grants combined and equivalent to the annual health budget. The newly elected democratic government instructed the Lund Committee to develop a child support grant within the existing SMG budget, which ruled out simply expanding the reach of the SMG.

In 1995 South Africa became a signatory to the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Children, committing itself to the 'First Call for Children'. This provided an impetus within government for programmes designed to serve the needs of children. To realise some of the rights for children, the Lund Committee recommended, among other policy reforms, the introduction of cash transfers designed to reach poor children. This was the first major social policy reform after the 1994 transition to democracy. It relied on best international practice at the time on how to reach children living in poor households.

At a meeting attended by Williams and the provincial leaders of welfare,⁵

the provincial welfare ministers (or MECs) were consulted on whether to terminate both the child and parent portions of the SMG with immediate effect and to replace it with a modest family grant or cash transfer (Lund 2008: 18). While the MINMECS were the structures which brought together national ministers and MECs were required by the constitution to cooperate, they did not have the final decision on the matter. Any changes to social policy required a parliamentary amendment to the Social Assistance Act. The MINMECs were accountable to the national minister of Welfare and their views on the CSG would have been influential in shaping the final decision to adopt the new policy (Budlender et al 2008).

The Lund committee proposed phasing out the SMG which had a monthly rate of R127 per child (up to the age of 18) and R410 for a parent, and replacing it with a Child Support Grant (CSG) at a monthly rate of R70 per child, until the age of nine. Since over half of the country's population lived in poverty (Patel 2012: 207), the amount suggested was very low. But the Lund Committee thought it important to keep open the government budget line item that had been there for the SMG as a mechanism through which further policy pressure could be exerted.⁶ A modest grant would ensure that the CSG became part of the government system and it would take a special effort by its opponents to remove it.

Patel (Personal communication November 7, 2013) and Lund (2008: 22) noted that Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, the first ANC minister of the department, then renamed the Department of Social Welfare, was a strong political champion of the Lund Committee process and of social grants. She started the conversation on grants within the ANC with the support of president Thabo Mbeki, who understood their role in addressing issues related to economic vulnerability (Personal communication November 7, 2013). Fraser-Moleketi was not, however, an unqualified supporter of grants: she believed that active labour market policies would replace grants as the mainstay of social security for poor people (Barchiesi 2011: 109). Social grants, therefore, were to be limited to special needs, while job creation would address the plight of the unemployed. Later, this was to become a common theme in mainstream thinking, within and outside the ANC – its effect was to reduce support for grants. But her support for targeted grants, rather than more generalised social security, was consistent with Lund and Patel's concern to win support for an extended child grant. According to Barchiesi (2011), the CSG was the testing ground for this developmental social welfare approach.

The Lund Committee was, in a sense, responsible for bringing extended social security onto the agenda of the democratic dispensation – in an international environment in which it was more common to restrict grant systems than expand them (Budlender 2008: 3). Many politicians responsible for welfare had little knowledge of the grant system.⁷ Lund notes that was why the CSG was facilitated by the Cabinet, which, in March 1997, agreed to phase out the SMG in favour of the CSG but changed the amount to R75 a month, and the eligibility to children only up to age seven. Since there was no pressure in society for an extended grant and even the CSG's champions in government did not see grants as a longer-term solution, the strategy of suggesting a small grant in the hope that it could be increased later accurately reflected the balance of power at the time. It has also been argued that, once the right to a grant was established in national law, government had an obligation to provide the necessary funds and non-provision could be challenged as unconstitutional (Budlender et al 2008).

Cash transfers and economic policy

The CSG challenged mainstream thinking both in South Africa and the world by allowing poor families with a monthly income to feed children irrespective of whether their parents were ill or unemployed. This was inconsistent with the prevailing view in the world that grants should not be extended to people unless they could not work, as well as thinking in the new government elite which, like Fraser-Moleketi, saw grants at best as a short-term solution because they were not 'developmental'.

The initial social policy programme of the first democratic government, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (1994), had a vision for a democratic South Africa where people would be granted access to services (Visser 2004: 7). But it did not rely on expanding cash transfers as a redistributive mechanism but on *restructuring the state and creating jobs* (italics included). The RDP White Paper published in 1994 made no mention of redistributing resources through poverty alleviation measures (Visser 2004: 7). The CSG was also introduced at a time when the Growth, Employment and Redistribution policy (1996) was being implemented.

This, of course, made the achievement of the CSG even more significant and further vindicated the decision to press for a small grant. The grant became a mechanism for fiscal redistribution and has made a difference to the health status and well-being of poor families (Lund 2008). Women receive the child support grant as an acknowledgment that they are primary

caregivers. The grant is paid into a bank account which provides women with greater financial leverage when bargaining in informal support networks within the family.

Equally importantly, it may have ensured that cash transfers would be part of the South African government's response to poverty. Some scholars consider the allocation of social grants a quiet revolution because it acknowledges the right to social security as a human right, as stipulated in the South African Constitution (Mabugu et al 2014).

Political alliances and the roll-out of the CSG

The Lund Committee's view that introducing a small CSG would lead to bigger things was vindicated. The number of recipients has continued to grow. The grant amount has remained small because expanding the number of recipients has taken precedence over increasing the grant. Lund (2013) argued that this blunts the impact of the grant but it universalised the provision of grants and so made a Basic Income Grant (BIG) more achievable. As their reach grew, grants began to gain support, despite continued opposition within and outside the government.

Proponents of grants may well have needed the support because, in addition to the opposition discussed thus far, the withdrawal of the SMG created a huge controversy because it had been a vital lifeline for thousands of poorer women and children, especially in the Western Cape. It was a larger grant than the proposed amount for the CSG. Consequently, many stakeholders were opposed to the new CSG and activist groupings for children and women's rights resisted the replacement of the SMG by a smaller financial amount. Other opponents of the CSG in the welfare sector were social workers who wanted more resources for their work, providing social services for families.

But allies began to emerge in the governing alliance – voices advocating 'developmental welfare' and proponents of this paradigm were strongly influenced by the capability approach popularised by Sen (1985) and Nussbaum (2000) who prioritised the aptitude of individuals to achieve well-being through the functional use of material, psychological, and social assets (Barchiesi 2011: 111). Subsequently, the White Paper for Social Welfare drawn up in 1997 sought to move away from curative services towards a preventative programme of developmental social welfare. As Fraser-Moleketi's attitude shows, this view, while insisting that grants were not a long-term solution, did see them as a temporary necessity.

Allies of the CSG were also found inside the government bureaucracy, the trade union federations, and civil society sectors and within social and economic research institutions. Evidence was emerging that grants were not being used only for the stated person but also for the care of elderly people and children. They were often shared to meet common needs and served as a welcome cash injection for those who had no employment (Interviews Lund and Patel 2013).

From 2000, Zane Dangor, a member of the Development Resources Centre, who was later to become an adviser to Zola Skweyiya the then minister of Social Development, participated in a platform on social security with Cosatu, the South African Council of Churches and civil society organisations calling for the extension of the child security grant and the adoption of the basic income grant (Interview Dangor 2013). This was the beginning of the basic income grant (BIG) coalition which campaigned for a universal grant for all citizens. While the BIG coalition never became a key vehicle of popular mobilisation, it did influence official thinking – while the BIG has not been conceded, it does seem likely that the government decision to extend social grants to new beneficiaries was partly an attempt to ward off pressures for a BIG.

A noteworthy feature of dynamics since the Cabinet agreed to introduce the CSG is that, despite continuing opposition, grants have continued to expand – both because they have been extended to new beneficiaries and because more people who qualify have received them. This does not mean that the advocates of grants have always won the argument – as noted above, they have never achieved a BIG. But it does mean that, for more than a decade and a half, more and more citizens have received grants.

The age of eligibility for the CSG was gradually extended. In 2003, Skweyiya announced a phased approach to the roll-out of grants to children aged seven and eight. This incremental approach would by 2005 include children aged 11, 12 and 13 (Skweyiya 2003). Subsequently, he intimated that the CSG would eventually be extended to include children up to the age of 18. Equally or more important, Skweyiya, working with Dangor (both when he was outside government and when he later joined it), began a programme which aimed to extend grants to as many eligible beneficiaries as possible. This was to prove more significant than the policy changes because it was by no means automatic that all those entitled to seek grants would do so – this required a conscious effort by the government, which Skweyiya initiated.

Initially, many of the ills of the apartheid past hampered eligible children's

access to grants. In 1998, only 25 per cent of the children were eligible due to barriers associated with cohort birth certificates and identity documents for caregivers. Patel (2011) notes that the lack of birth registration documents disadvantaged recipients, especially those whose mothers were deceased or absent, which meant that the application for a child grant was declined. Other significant barriers to access included proof of income to assess eligibility of the applicant. A lack of co-ordination among government departments resulted in bureaucratic delays in the processing of documents (Goldblatt et al 2006, UNICEF 2012).

As the grants were rolled out, a backlog built up in their allocation. To address these, Fraser-Moleketi facilitated amendments to the Social Assistance Act (2004) which ensured that grant applications be finalised within three months. However, Frye (Personal communication November 18, 2013) points out that this minimum was not adhered to: it took two to three years in the Eastern Cape for applications to be processed. The Black Sash challenged the constitutionality of the minister's decision and the outcome of the litigation granted everyone a pay-out of R1,000 – R3,000 (Interview Frye 2013). This was an important legal precedent because it meant that the administrative system would be justly guaranteed across all grants and applied equally.

By 2008, the upgraded administrative systems at the Department of Home Affairs assisted the processing of birth registrations. This, with community mobilisation campaigns using mobile units to reach rural areas, accessible service hours and registrations at hospitals resulted in 78 per cent of children under five years of age being registered in 2008 (UNIFEM 2012). But advocacy groups continue to point out that conditionalities penalise children who live in communities where administrative services do not exist. Notwithstanding the improvements, the lack of adequate birth registration documents remains a barrier to CSG access. In addition, children who are among the poorest and the most vulnerable and whose mothers are deceased or absent are less likely to receive a CSG (Patel 2011). Recent amendments to the regulations removed the requirement that children whose birth is not registered should be denied access to the CSG.

To begin to ensure that grants reached more recipients, Dangor, then a member of a network of civil society organisations called ACESS, worked strategically with Skweyiya's department: departmental officials worked with civil society organisations to mobilise people to claim social security rights. Dangor (2013) believes this is an example of how to use the fiscal

space as an act of solidarity with the poor and provide, for those in government, an opportunity to push for more redistribution of resources. The strategy was twofold. The first step was to get as many black children into the system as possible; the second to pressurise government for an increase in the size of the grant (Interview Dangor 2013).

Skweyiya's public speeches show that he never announced or even acknowledged that he had embarked on a campaign to extend grants – he contented himself with periodic announcements that the number of beneficiaries had expanded. In 2004, he declared:

Social grants have increased 3,5 times since 1994, significantly reducing the proportion of people that would be living in poverty were it not for state transfers. Between April 2000 and the end of November 2004 alone, the number of social grant beneficiaries has increased from 3,2 million to no less than 7,5 million! This represents an increase of 128 percent over the last four years. The government currently pays to the excess of R34 billion on social grants per annum! (Skweyiya 2004a).

In 2007 he revealed that the 'number of beneficiaries of social assistance has increased from about 3,5 million in 1999 to 12 million. Over eight million children now have access to social assistance' (Skweyiya 2007). But there is no recorded instance in which he acknowledged that it had been his strategy to expand the number of beneficiaries and so he has offered no account for how he achieved this.

One reason for this may be the fact that grants were opposed consistently by Trevor Manuel, then minister of Finance and political head of the national Treasury, whose key role was to oppose this expenditure because he considered it unwarranted. One of many examples of differences between Manuel and Skweyiya was Manuel's public opposition to the BIG (see below), which Skweyiya publicly supported (Seekings and Matisonn 2010: 14). Manuel also made repeated statements complaining that grants had become the fastest growing category of government expenditure since 2001. In a speech in Parliament in 2006 he asked: 'Is our vision of a future South Africa one in which over 20 percent of the population depends on welfare for their livelihood?' (Manuel quoted in *Sunday Times* September 10, 2006). Although Manuel was an extremely influential minister, he could not demand that Skweyiya be prevented from extending grants to people who were entitled to them. But, had Skweyiya declared publicly that he was actively looking for recipients, he may have been told in Cabinet to desist. In effect, then, the extension of grants to millions more people was not the result of

a complex social process, but of a strategy chosen by a few politicians, working with sympathisers in civil society, who felt obliged not to announce what they were doing for fear of being stopped by opponents in the Cabinet.

The ANC was divided on grants – social democrats, nationalists, trade unionists, and new monetarists in its ranks took differing positions. Manuel, as noted earlier, led the opposition and, in his 2008 budget speech capped the CSG at age 15, attracting criticism from non-government organisations and lobby groups who supported Skweyiya’s wish to raise it to 18 (Tolsi 2008). Manuel said youth between the ages of 15 and 18 were eligible for training and consequently employable, a view in line with Fraser-Moleketi’s belief that active labour market policies would replace grants (Barchiesi 2011: 109). But Skweyiya used his stature within the government and ANC to promote his strong view that the old age pension had to be extended and that all children up to age 18 should get the grant. He and Dangor saw the ANC as an ally in their fight against others in government: according to Dangor, ‘Skweyiya reminded everyone that his first boss was not the government but the secretary-general of the ANC’ (Interview Dangor 2013). While it took proponents of the extension of social grants years to convince ANC members of the right to social justice for recipients of social grants, they did win the argument. In 2002 and 2007, the ANC passed resolutions supporting an increase in the CSG age limit.

A sign of the limits of the pro-grants position was, however, the debate on the BIG. In 2000, Skweyiya established the Taylor Committee of Inquiry into a Comprehensive System of Social Security, asking it to investigate public and private forms of social security and to identify those who fell through the system and still lacked social protection. Its report recommended a package of programmes to protect those most vulnerable to poverty and its effects. To address income poverty, the Committee recommended three universal grants:

- a Basic Income Grant for everyone over 18 but below 60 for women or 65 for men;
- a Child Support Grant for children up to 18; and
- Pensions for women over 60 and men over 65.

It believed that these would ensure that everyone received the basic minimum necessary to avoid poverty.

The Committee further recommended that a basic package of services must be provided to everyone (universal). To provide for the special needs

of children living with disabilities or who are forced to live apart from their parents, it recommended a Foster Care Grant for children in alternate care (not living with their parents) and a Care Dependency Grant for physically or mentally disabled children. Skweyiya supported the BIG recommendation (Enzor 2006), placing the call for BIG on the ANC agenda at a time when government was forecasting a budget surplus and the SA Revenue Service had repeatedly exceeded its tax collection targets by billions of Rand. Skweyiya was opposed by Manuel who warned of the danger of locking government into a spending commitment from which it might be unable to extricate itself in an economic turndown (Overy nd: 2, Seekings and Matisonn 2010: 14). He claimed to sympathise with its intent. But the government's approach was 'to extend social security and income support through targeted measures, and to contribute also to creating work opportunities and investing further in education, training and health services' (Manuel 2004).

As noted above, the grants lobby lost this argument – it could continue to expand the grants programme but could not win approval for a policy which made grants a permanent feature of social policy.

Democracy and social solidarity with the poor

Democracy was an important ally of the grants lobby. It was helped by the democratic process of the 1990s, especially the parliamentary process, which allowed for collective deliberation, greater transparency and public participation (Proudlock 2011: 161). In the run up to the adoption of the CSG, members of Parliament, as the elected representatives of the people, were given an opportunity to influence policy choices.

Nevertheless, parliament did provide an alternative to an executive which tended not to be deliberative, transparent nor participatory (Proudlock 2011) – civil society was not able to participate in policy development when the CSG was first conceptualised by the Executive. Although Proudlock notes that members of Parliament were 'never brave enough to challenge the Executive about making changes to the regulations', the dialogue in Parliament contributed to the overall advocacy campaign for two reasons. First, the ANC MPs participated in party conferences where policy was deliberated and this debate ultimately influenced government policy. Second, while civil society organisations did not have access to the formal political space where decisions were made, they could convince ANC MPs of the need to expand the CSG. The public hearings and meetings held by Parliament resulted in media coverage which contributed towards debate by the public,

demonstrating wide civil society support for the expansion of the age limit and amount of the grant. These public debates ultimately contributed to the ANC supporting a higher age limit (Proudlock 2011: 161).

Despite opposition within government to welfare entitlements, there were significant returns in terms of electoral support (Barchiesi 2011: 98). It was not infrequent during election times for ANC candidates to boast about the provision of social grants among voters who expect them as rights. This view was juxtaposed with the policy positions of Treasury officials who were alarmed at the financial unsustainability of the grants.

Skweyiya repeatedly presented proposals to Cabinet for the expansion of the CSG. Parliament deliberated long and hard over the age threshold but, after a lengthy debate, the Executive, rather than MPs in Parliament, reached a policy decision. According to Proudlock (2011), it was claimed that the decision on the age threshold is a 'policy' decision and the Constitution empowers the Executive to decide on policy. While there was a lack of consensus among members of Parliament, Manuel had the final authority and delayed the reforms in the name of fiscal prudence (Proudlock 2011: 165).

Parliament was not, therefore, a guaranteed ally of the pro-grants lobby. But it did give it a leverage which direct engagement with the executive would not have offered.

Conclusion

Grants, however, continue to face opposition. Scholars differ widely on the subject. Some insist that grants challenge the apartheid legacy by developing a social floor (Patel 2011). Others do not regard grants as a reason for government not to intervene in the labour market (Marais 2011, Barchiesi 2011), while another group considers social grants a form of dependence on government hand-outs (Bernstein 2013). A study by the University of Stellenbosch suggests that households spending the grant on food has a positive impact on children, all for a mere R310 per month per child per household (Grootes 2014). This evidence influenced the ANC's 2012 Policy Conference, which proposed a jobseekers' grant for unemployed youth, as a way to get young people into the grant system.

In a climate of high levels of unemployment and the non-functioning of the Further Education and Training colleges to absorb unemployed youth, the CSG has had an impact in alleviating the vulnerabilities of recipients. The CSG has the potential to change household dynamics, especially decision-

making on child-focused investments, control over economic resources, and gender dynamics and norms. Its contribution continues to reduce the vulnerabilities of the poor even if it does not alleviate the impoverished conditions endured by the majority of recipients.

The CSG has undergone some changes since its introduction, including the removal of some conditions, such as modifications to the means test, increases in the grant amount, and the extension of the age group. Budlender et al (2008) argues that these changes are a consequence of the successful advocacy efforts of civil society organisations. In the early years of the democratic dispensation, government was open to introducing legislative changes that increased the registration of recipients and allayed criticism. While assisting people with their grant applications, many civil society organisations continue advocating for the grants to be increased. This dual role is part of a deliberate advocacy strategy. By increasing take up, the organisations strengthen the effectiveness of their programmes, strengthen the case for continual improvement and expansion of the grant system, while increasing public demand for the grants to be increased (Budlender et al 2008).

The actions of a relatively small group of people who acted without a mass social movement was responsible, both for the implementation of the CSG and for the fact that it paved the way for an extension of social grants to millions of children. The further extension of social security, however, may require both sustained campaigning and a change in the social balance of power. The actions of small groups in civil society and government have achieved much more than might have been anticipated.

Notes

1. Thank you to professor Steven Friedman for his insightful comments on the various drafts of this article. Thanks also to professor Robert van Niekerk for his insights and patience.
2. The Carnegie Commission of Enquiry was established to investigate the poor white problem which culminated in the establishment of the first state welfare department in 1937 (see Grosskopf 1932).
3. Black is a political term for those who were not classified white under apartheid. Blacks are persons classified as African, Coloured and Indian.
4. Bantustans were territories set aside by the apartheid regime for black inhabitants of *South Africa* and *South West Africa* (now *Namibia*), as part of the policy of apartheid. [<http://www.sahistory.org.za>] (accessed January 5, 2014).

5. Official SA Municipal Year Book (1995) Provincial MECs were Dr Trudie Thomas, Department Health and Welfare, Eastern Cape; Mr Johannes Blanche, Department of Social Welfare, Gauteng; Prince GL Zulu, Department of Social Welfare, Kwazulu-Natal; Dr Modise Motlaopane, Department Health and Welfare, Northern Cape; Dr Molefi Paul Sefularo, Department of Health and Social Welfare, North West Province; Dr J. Phaahla, Department of Health and Welfare, Northern Province, Mr E Rasool, Department of Health and Social Services, Western Cape.
6. Its recommendation was based on the view that once the 'principle of needs based measure was accepted, even if this was restricted to the cost of food for the children, then once the CSG was secured, the work could be done on the basis for increasing the amount of the benefit' (Lund 2008: 62).
7. Lund (2008) notes seven out of nine provincial MECs for Health and Welfare were male medical doctors who had little knowledge of the pension system at all.

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List of interviewees

Prof Servaas van den Berg, retired university academic, June 20, 2013

Prof Francie Lund, University of KwaZulu-Natal, July 2, 2013

Prof Pieter le Roux, University of Stellenbosch, October 5, 2013

Mr Zane Dangor, Advisor Minister of Social Development, July 29, 2013

Prof Leila Patel, Director Centre for Social Development, November 7, 2013

Ms Paula Proudlock, Children's Institute, University of Cape Town, July 29, 2013

Ms Isobel Frye, Director, SPII, Johannesburg, November 18, 2013