

## **Expanding Social Protection in Africa: A Menu of Early Policy Ideas**

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### **Abstract**

Since the turn of the century, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has recorded high levels of economic growth. Between 2000 and 2022, economic growth averaged 4.0 percent per annum (World Bank, 2023)– leading to a systematic decline in both absolute and relative levels of household income poverty. Hence, data shows that the Headcount Index of poverty decreasing from 56.5% in 2000 to 34.9% in 2019 (World Bank, 2023). Despite this progress, however, the number of individuals in SSA who experienced extreme poverty rose from 379 million in 2000 to 391 million in 2019, due both to population expansion and the slowdown in economic growth (World Bank, 2023). Hence, the early period of inclusive growth had given way to more moderate growth and hence reduction in poverty levels, amidst continuing population expansion in the region. Furthermore, 23 (82.1%) of the 28 countries with extreme poverty rates of above 30.0 percent are located within SSA (Aikins & Mclachlan, 2022).

Given in part the dominance of SSA in any discussion around global poverty challenges – possibly the core aim contained within the SDGs - the expansion and integration of more comprehensive social protection systems in Africa must remain a high-level priority. Needless to say, a well-targeted social protection system lies at the heart of any anti-poverty, pro-growth agenda for the region. In this note, we hope to provide a brief overview of social protection spending and coverage in Africa. This is followed by a suggested set of policy options around what we have termed ‘traditional’ and new infrastructure for social protection. We then consider two social policy pivots that may be possible in the form of informal sector coverage and also a post-Covid 19 set of interventions. We conclude with key observations of financing options in terms of both additional tax revenue options and redistribution within existing fiscal envelopes for African governments.