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How does social assistance address vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities?

Towards achieving the SDGs in South Africa

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Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a mandate to address vertical (across populations), horizontal (between groups) and spatial inequalities (across geographical localities). The intersecting effects of vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities are increasingly relevant in the current global political, social and economic climate.

Social protection has been identified as an important policy intervention to address vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities. The paper focuses on South Africa as a country case study, to discuss whether social assistance has engaged with vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities in an integrated manner. Social grants in South Africa have had significant effects in curbing vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities. In some cases, grants have contributed to a de-clustering of income disadvantage from other forms of disadvantage. Social grants represent a ‘fertile functioning’, with positive outcomes in education, health and women’s empowerment. However, their ability to reverse patterns of corrosive disadvantage in the labour markets and economy of care has been limited. Constitutional guarantees have contributed to social inclusion, but other public discourses, particularly around gender are in conflict with the positive impacts of social assistance on horizontal inequalities. The persistent and pervasive levels of poverty among children highlight policy gaps that need to be addressed.

Keywords

Inequalities; Sustainable Development Goals; South Africa; social protection

Bio

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Introduction

Inequality has received global attention in the post-2015 development agenda. Against a background of severe inequalities and persistent exclusion, two important themes emerge. The first is a focus on social, economic and political inclusiveness (across the inequality spectrum), and the second is that priority should be given to those who are most disadvantaged (at the bottom of the inequality spectrum). The SDGs' focus on equity specifically identifies those who because of their age, gender, race, ethnicity, disability or migrant status, lack opportunities, resources and influence (UN 2015). With regard to South Africa, the SDGs find expression in the Africa Agenda 2063 and in national monitoring targets (StatsSA 2017b), with a focus on the most vulnerable and the extreme poor.

The task of tackling the intersecting relational and distributional dimensions of inequality is daunting and complex. In many contexts, socio-economic and civil rights are pitted against one another. Progress on some fronts has coincided with widening gaps on others. Declines in poverty, improvements in health, expansions in education and access to technology have created opportunities for political participation. In many ways, the world has become less tolerant of social exclusion (UN 2016). Yet progress has been uneven and advances have not been enough to eliminate disadvantage and promote inclusive societies. Frequently, rising income levels have gone hand in hand with growing inequality, with disproportionate gains for the wealthy. Unemployment is widespread and many workers are unable to find decent work or struggle to earn sufficient incomes in vulnerable jobs. Trends in climate change, political configurations, demographic shifts, migratory impacts of conflict and globalized markets have affected exclusion (UN 2016).

The paper describes vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities and how they can provide an integrated picture of disadvantage and social exclusion. Interventions to address intersecting inequalities are referred to as *distributional* if they primarily address who gets what (in terms of resources, opportunities and political participation) as a route to addressing vertical horizontal and spatial inequalities. *Relational* policies and interventions are those which tackle discriminatory laws and attitudes as their point of departure in the direction of strengthening a 'community of care' (Wolff and De-Shalit 2007). It is argued that the SDGs provide a broad mandate for addressing distributional and relational aspects of inequality in an integrated manner. Social protection is located within this framework, as an intervention which is intended to address vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities, primarily distributively and in some cases relationally. The paper looks at the case of South Africa to ask what difference it makes to consider both the relational and distributional outcomes of social assistance on intersecting inequalities and how conceptualizing vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities supports inclusion and the targeting of those most at risk of being left 'behind', towards achieving the SDGs by 2030.

Vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities

A vertical model of inequality is measured at the individual or household level (Kabeer 2016; Arauco et al. 2014). For example, in South Africa, the share of total income going to the bottom 40 percent of households was 8.3 percent in 2015 (StatsSA 2017b). Conceptually, the analysis of vertical inequalities is closely related to the assessment of poverty understood as an

individual deprivation. A vertical measure of inequality ranks individuals or households according to a particular outcome across a population. Common indices include the Gini coefficient and the Palma ratio. Vertical inequalities are characterised by their range and their distribution across a population. SDG 10.1 speaks to vertical income inequality, and advocates for the progressive achievement of income growth of the bottom 40 percent of the population at a rate higher than the national average.

Horizontal inequalities are measured at a group level (Stewart, Brown, and Mancini 2005). In South Africa, households headed by (mainly female) black Africans account for the overwhelming share of income within the bottom 40 percent (92.3 percent) compared to 0.5 percent of whites (StatsSA 2017b). The theory about horizontal inequalities is closely related to literature on social exclusion, and an understanding that individuals' well-being is affected by their individual and group circumstances. Group-based inequalities derive from social, economic, political and cultural exclusionary institutions and norms which devalue certain groups compared to others. Gender, caste, race and ethnicity are identities which are ascribed from birth. Other forms of group-identity can revolve around age, disability status and religion. Horizontal inequalities can be measured using indices such as the group-weighted Gini coefficient or the Theil index. In the SDGs, target 10.2 of the Agenda 2030 stipulates that social inclusion should improve the terms of participation in society for people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status. While this is an important list, groups may vary by context and also over time, new groups may emerge and other groups may exist but be statistically invisible (UN 2016). Target 10.3 acknowledges the discriminatory nature of exclusion, and sets a goal to ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action.

Spatial inequalities are measured based on geographical factors. For example, in South Africa, poverty rates in urban areas are 25.1 percent, compared to 65.4 percent in rural areas. Inequalities may be evident across rural/urban divides, across provinces or regions, or within municipalities. Spatial disadvantages, such as living in geographically remote and difficult to reach areas or living in an overcrowded slum with scarce access to infrastructure and subject to environmental hazards can have a significant impact on the development and livelihoods of those who live in these areas (Arauco et al. 2014). Subnational inequalities are not referred to in a specific goal, but are implied, for instance with a call for inclusive and sustainable processes of urbanization (SDG 11), and the commitment to gathering data disaggregated by geographical location (UN 2015).

Vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities may be measured according to money-metric (such as income or expenditure) or non money-metric indicators (such as access to tertiary education or voting patterns)¹. The selection of which indicators to monitor matters for the analysis of inequality. Income inequality continues to be the most widespread measure of vertical,

¹ One difference between vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities concerns the different expectations for equality along the respective axes. It is typically acknowledged that some vertical inequality is morally acceptable (though the extent of acceptable inequality is the subject of much debate)(Plagerson and Ulriksen 2016), and may be explained by differences in personal effort and ability. There is some consensus that the bulk of inequality of opportunity and outcome is attributable to factors beyond a person's control, and that these are morally unacceptable. In contrast horizontal inequalities are universally deplorable, given their discriminatory origin. With regard to spatial inequalities, it is arguable that some disparities (e.g. rural/urban distance to school) might be tolerable, but others would signal injustice (geographical disparities in educational outcomes).

horizontal and spatial inequalities. For inequality, just as for poverty, critics of purely money-metric indicators argue that measures are incommensurable and need to be monitored concurrently, using both objective and subjective indicators (Wolff and De-Shalit 2007). This paper draws on the UN (2016) report ‘Leaving no one behind: the imperative of inclusive development’ which suggests that for an adequate understanding of the economic and social patterns of exclusion, the following domains need to be considered: opportunities (access and attainment in health and education), resources (access to labour markets, wages and income) and voice (participation in political civic and cultural life).

How are vertical, horizontal, and spatial inequalities related?

The SDGs establish that both vertical and horizontal inequalities matter intrinsically. They also determine the basis for a framework of integrated analysis and monitoring of vertical, horizontal and spatial dimensions. This can take both descriptive and analytical forms.

Descriptively, the relationship between vertical and horizontal/spatial inequalities can provide a picture of the breadth and depth of inequality, and how resources, opportunities and voice are disaggregated and dispersed within a population. For example, it is possible for income inequality to decrease, but for the gains to be captured by the ethnic majority, while leaving the conditions of ethnic minorities unchanged. This is a broader remit in comparison with poverty-related analyses since it is defined over the *entire* population, and does not only focus on the poor.

Analytically, a combined investigation of vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities asks how these interact with each other. Does vertical inequality in access to opportunities, resources and participation cause social and spatial exclusion or vice versa? This analysis can build on existing research around the clustering of vertical disadvantages such as poor health and low incomes, or of horizontal disadvantages such as gender and race which impact the most marginalized (Crenshaw 1991). Similarly, vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities mutually influence each other. Poor people are more likely to become disabled than people in higher income groups, and disability may lead to further impoverishment. If unrestrained, widening economic gaps can lead to a concentration of political influence among those who are wealthier and reproduce unequal economic and social opportunities through differentiated access to public services (UN 2016). The suppression of political voice among those at the lower end of the inequality spectrum can reinforce and cause social tensions (Stewart, Brown, and Mancini 2005). While many poverty-related frameworks have largely integrated distributional and relational analyses (Hickey and Du Toit 2007), approaches to inequality are less cohesive, as the reliance on income-based indices demonstrates.

Understanding why patterns of disadvantage form and persist entails identifying ‘corrosive disadvantages’ (disadvantages which yield further disadvantages) or ‘drivers’ of compound inequalities (Wolff and De-Shalit 2007), which entrench patterns across the inequality spectrum and which lock people into disadvantage at the bottom end of the spectrum. Two examples of drivers of inequality which underlie the mutually reinforcing impacts of vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities include labour market configurations and the dynamics of care. In many contexts, labour markets and wage disparities entrench inequalities, particularly when they continue to reflect socially-driven distinctions based on ethnicity, race, age, gender and other

personal attributes that should have no bearing on job opportunities or workers' competencies. Labour markets may also reinforce spatially-defined inequalities. Secondly, care and domestic work remain an often hidden driver of both economic and social inequality. Patterns of giving and receiving (paid and unpaid) care are integral to economic development and are closely related to inequality structures, especially gender, but also race and social class. In many contexts, women from disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups provide care services for more powerful social groups, while their own needs for care are disregarded. As a result, negative effects on education and income-generating prospects often lead to financial precarity and exclusion from the public domain (Razavi 2007).

It is important to note that vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities may or may not intersect. It is possible to be a non-poor woman, however across socio-economic strata, gender is associated with discrimination and women tend to occupy a subordinate status compared to men. The SDGs highlight that identifying those who are left behind, is closely linked to recognising when there is an accumulation of disadvantages in several domains which reinforce each other. Understanding the intersections of multiple and overlapping inequalities highlights those who are systematically, severely and persistently excluded (Kabeer and Santos 2017; Arauco et al. 2014).

Policy interventions to address vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities

The SDGs represent a commitment to reducing inequalities, both vertical and horizontal/spatial, with a central pledge to leave no one behind. In considering the interventions that can contribute to achieving social cohesion and reduced distributional disparities, the UN report 'Leaving no one behind: the imperative of inclusive development' observes that these are related yet separate outcomes that can become delinked (UN 2016). Even in cases where states have made concerted efforts to bring marginalized groups into the development and growth processes, overall income inequality can remain unaffected, as is the case in South Africa. Conversely, declining income inequality does not automatically translate into improved welfare outcomes for all marginalized individuals or groups. In other cases, efforts to address one disadvantage may create another across distributional/relational lines, for example in the case of a slum clearance which improves housing and some health outcomes but which dissolves productive social networks with detrimental impacts for labour market participation, care and other health and wellbeing outcomes (Wolff and De-Shalit 2007).

Measures to reduce distributional disparities and promote social inclusion need to be pursued in conjunction with each other. However, while the breadth of the SDG mandate is a strength it also allows for malleability in the face of divergent institutional agendas in terms of identifying drivers of equality or 'fertile functionings'² which can generate advantage across the vertical/horizontal/spatial spectrum of inequality (Wolff and De-Shalit 2007). For example, the World Bank tends to forefront interventions which tackle distributional (material) inequality as a route towards improving relational equality, and tends to advocate market-based solutions to economic growth and job creation, with a cautious approach to the redistributive role of the state

² The term 'fertile functionings' derives from the capability approach. Functionings are realized achievements/outcomes, in contrast with capabilities which refers to real opportunities (Robeyns 2017). Fertile functionings are those the securing of which is likely to secure further functionings (Wolff and De-Shalit 2007).

(UN 2016; World Bank 2018). On the other hand, UN reports that operationalise the SDGs, informed by several empirical studies, are less prescriptive regarding the precedence of interventions which directly address horizontal or vertical inequalities, but do contend that both are necessary (UN 2018, 2016). The establishment firstly of a universal approach to social policy is recommended, to be complemented by special or targeted measures to address the distinct obstacles faced by disadvantaged, marginalized or otherwise excluded social groups. They also advocate for policies aimed directly at tackling discrimination and that enable the participation of excluded persons and communities in decision-making processes. With regard to addressing intersecting inequalities, drawing on evidence across several countries, scholars have emphasised the importance of social and political mobilisation for goals of social justice rather than on technocratic details of aid or policy formulation (Arauco et al. 2014), underscoring the centrality of addressing relational inequalities.

In practice, commitments established at the international level are likely to interact with moral, economic and political priorities at the domestic level in shaping responses to inequality. Indeed, the SDGs do take into account that ‘no single set of policies or strategies is applicable across all countries and contexts’ UN (2016, 7). Overall, there is considerable scope for debate and divergence between responses, some ideologically and some contextually driven. It is therefore crucial for interventions to be informed by a detailed understanding of vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities and of how responses can differentially engage with the distributional and relational dimensions of inequality.

Social protection as a way to address vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development underscores the importance of social protection for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Social protection is presented as a development policy tool that can alleviate poverty, inequality and social exclusion (SDG 10.4). There are several reasons supporting this. Firstly, in several countries, tax-financed social protection has reduced income inequality, as well as supported capital accumulation for poor households. Secondly, social protection programmes can support access to opportunities, and have been linked to improved health, nutritional and educational outcomes. Thirdly, with regard to horizontal inequalities, the UN ‘Report on the World Social Situation 2018’ examines the contribution of social protection to social inclusion, focusing on several disadvantaged groups including children, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, international migrants, ethnic and racial minorities, and indigenous peoples. The findings highlight the availability, accessibility and adequacy of programmes as key determinants of their ability to address social inclusion. Impacts on participation are linked to whether programmes are legally protected, and whether marginalised groups are included in the design and monitoring of programmes (UN 2018).

In the sections that follow I summarise available evidence on vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities in South Africa, and then discuss the role that social protection has played in addressing these intersecting inequalities.

Vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities in South Africa

Despite various policies and legislation to redress the inequalities of the past, structural inequalities have persisted in post-apartheid South Africa (NPC 2011; StatsSA 2016c; 2017b). South Africa has made progress in reducing multidimensional poverty over the past two decades (despite an increase in the past five years), but high inequality acts as a brake on poverty reduction, and poverty rates remain high. South Africans remain sharply divided along racial and socioeconomic lines, even where discriminatory laws have been abolished (David et al. 2018). The picture of inequality in access to resources, opportunities and political participation that emerges across different vertical, horizontal and spatial dimensions is varied.

With regard to access to resources, South Africa is the most unequal country in the world, measured in terms of both income and wealth. Currently, the estimated Gini coefficient for income inequality is 0.68 and more than half of the country's population lives under the national poverty line³ (StatsSA 2017b). Wealth inequality is even greater than income inequality, and is an important source of intergenerational inequality. Analysis of wealth inequality between 2008 and 2015 found that the top percentile of households had 71 percent of the wealth and the bottom 60 percent had 7.0 percent (World Bank 2018).

Poverty, income, expenditure and wealth intersect directly with race, gender, age and disability. In 2015, the average household annual income per capita among households with a female head was 0.6 times the equivalent in male-headed households (StatsSA 2016c). The proportion of females living below the poverty line is consistently higher than for men and has remained so in times of decreased and increased poverty (StatsSA 2017b). Income inequality between racial groups is very marked. Average incomes in households with a black African head were a fifth of those for households with a white head (StatsSA 2016c). Between 2011 and 2015, the poverty rate increased more steeply for Black Africans compared to other population groups (StatsSA 2017b). As an example of intersecting inequalities, Black African women are the most disadvantaged in terms of proportion living below the poverty line. With regard to age, children are worst affected by income poverty, with 66.8 percent of children under the upper-bound¹ poverty line. Poverty levels are high among older persons too (44 percent) but lower than the national average. Persons with disabilities have much lower personal incomes when compared to non-disabled people, with women particularly disadvantaged (Kidd et al. 2018). Poverty is consistently higher among South Africans living in rural areas than for those in urban areas. In 2015, though poverty rates have improved overall, 65.4 percent of the rural population lived below the poverty line, compared to 25.4 percent in urban areas (StatsSA 2017b).

With regard to access to opportunities, South Africa has made great progress since 1994. Access to primary education is almost universal. There has also been a dramatic increase in access to electricity, water and sanitation services (StatsSA 2016a, d). Despite significant reductions in horizontal inequalities, the gaps that remain, for example in access to tertiary education and educational outcomes are stratified by race, gender and disability. Children with disabilities are at higher risk of living in households with inadequate access to water and sanitation, in informal settlements, and are less likely to attend school than non-disabled children. Only 63.9 percent of young people with severe functional limitations (age 12-17) were attending school compared to 96.1 percent of young people without disabilities (Kidd et al. 2018). Location, whether a child

³ Measured using the upper-bound poverty line of ZAR 992 per person per month (\approx US\$ 81) in 2015, set using cost-of-basic-needs approach, sufficient to purchase adequate levels of food and non-food items

lives in a township or rural area as opposed to an urban area, also contributes to inequalities of opportunity, particularly with regard to access to infrastructure (World Bank 2018). Despite achievements in reducing vertical and horizontal inequality gaps in access to opportunities, a subjective assessment of inequality found that more than two thirds of South Africans perceive that the extent of inequality (the gap between the poor and the rich) has not changed much or has even worsened over time (David et al. 2018).

In terms of public participation, voter turnout decreased from 86 percent in 1994 to 57 percent in 2014 (Schulz-Herzenberg 2014), but does not reflect the same horizontal inequalities as other outcomes. In provincial elections in 2016, women comprised 55 percent of all voters (Hicks, Morna, and Fonnah 2016). While in 2004, black Africans were more likely to vote than non-black Africans, in 2013, race did not matter for intention to vote. Race-related party choice is still evident but has lessened among young persons. A shift in turnout patterns across provinces has also been detected. In the 2004 elections, provinces with the largest rural populations had the higher rates of turnout, but by 2014 the highest turnout rates were found in the more populous provinces with the country's large urban centres, with more competitive election campaigns and a greater variety of political options (Schulz-Herzenberg 2014). There has been significant progress towards gender equity in women's political representation. Between 1994 and 2017, South Africa saw a steady increase in the number of female ministers at the national level (from 7,1 percent in 1994 to 48,5 percent in 2017) (StatsSA 2018a). Women's representation in local government has increased from 19 percent in 1995 to 41 percent in 2016 (Hicks, Morna, and Fonnah 2016).

In developing contexts, particularly with a dominant political party, protest action is an important measure of public participation and voice (Runciman 2017). In South Africa, protests, localized and predominantly in poor and marginalized communities, have been increasing since 2004. While they are typically referred to as 'service delivery' protests, there is a growing call to view these as 'reflective of wider concerns about deepening inequality and a wider crisis in the quality of South African democracy' (Runciman 2017, 424).

Among the drivers of inequality, available literature does show that labour market incomes and care dynamics reinforce horizontal and vertical inequalities. Income inequality changes have closely tracked changes in labour income patterns (Hundenborn, Leibbrandt, and Woolard 2017). Labour markets, driven by a growth path which is skills- and capital-intensive, are very polarised with a small proportion of high paying jobs in large companies in the formal sector, and a large number of insecure and poorly paid jobs in the informal sector (Hundenborn, Leibbrandt, and Woolard 2017). While wages have risen for skilled workers, the stagnation of wages for semi-skilled workers has fuelled the increase in wage inequality (World Bank 2018). High levels of unemployment have exacerbated the variance. In a context of slow job creation and sluggish growth, unemployment rose to 27.2 percent in the second quarter of 2018 (StatsSA 2018b). Disaggregated data demonstrates that racial and gender disparities are still predominant in South Africa's labour market. Unemployment rates are 30.5 percent for black Africans and 8 percent for whites; 25 percent for men and 29.5 percent for women (StatsSA 2018b). Race and gender still affect the ability to find a job, as well as the wages received once employed. The impact of race has fallen as a contributor to inequality but still remains one of the main contributing factors. In 2016, median monthly wages for white South Africans (ZAR12500, ≈US\$850) were over four times those for black South Africans (ZAR3000, ≈US\$204), and higher for men (ZAR3700, ≈US\$251) than for women (ZAR2900, ≈US\$197) (StatsSA 2016b).

People in urban areas have better prospects of getting a job and a higher probability of getting a formal job. Especially in rural areas, with underdeveloped and costly transport links, the unemployed, and unemployed youth in particular, often lack the resources and ability to relocate that a job would entail (World Bank 2018).

With regard to care, structural gendered divisions of labour, both paid and unpaid, continue to underpin many cultural and social practices in South Africa (Budlender 2010). Despite constitutional commitments to gender equality, women are often regarded as socially responsible for caring for others and the provision of basic services such as water, sustenance and education (Patel, Hochfeld, and Moodley 2013; Manderson and Block 2016). In addition, gender-based violence rates are high, with rape estimates in 2016/17 of 138 per 100000, the highest rate in the world (Stats SA 2018). Women are disadvantaged in the formal economy and labour market, with the lowest participation rates amongst women aged 15-24 years living in rural areas (16.8 percent compared to 20.6 percent for men in the same age group). Availability of affordable quality childcare is uneven and inadequate. Spatial rural/urban inequalities accentuate tensions for women between their reproductive and productive roles, with 28% of children living apart from their mother (van den Berg and Makusha 2018).

In sum, vertical and horizontal inequalities in access to resources are the most pronounced, particularly by race and urban/rural location. Horizontal inequalities have tended to increase in times when vertical inequality and poverty rates have increased. Overall the profile of those 'left behind' is that of female-headed, black African households with large numbers of children living in rural areas, with low or no wage income (World Bank 2018).

Social protection in South Africa

In this section, I discuss how social protection, and social assistance in particular, has engaged with vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities in South Africa. The discussion is not exhaustive, but explores some of the implications for an evaluation through the lens of intersecting inequalities and provides an opportunity to critically consider how social assistance tackles relational and distributional dimensions of inequality, and to reflect on what questions aid an integrated appraisal.

Since 1994, South Africa has used its tax resources to fund a wide range of initiatives to address poverty and inequality. By 2030, the National Development Plan (2012) sets the ambitious goals of eliminating poverty, reducing inequality to a Gini coefficient of 0.60, and raising the share of income of the bottom 40 percent from 6 to 10 percent.

Social assistance is one component of the 'social wage', together with a wide array of mechanisms: free primary health care, no-fee paying schools, school feeding programmes, housing schemes and the provision of free basic services (water, electricity and sanitation) to poorer households. In terms of social assistance, there are seven grants, the largest are the Child Support Grant, the Old Age Pension and the Disability Grant. Grants are received by 30 percent of individuals and 45 percent of households (GHS 2016).

I discuss available evidence on the grants in the light of the various dimensions raised by the discussion of vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities.

Do social grants address vertical inequality reduction?

Several studies show that social grants have had a substantial impact on the incidence and depth of poverty and inequality (Hundenborn, Leibbrandt, and Woolard 2017, World Bank 2018, UN 2018). Social transfers have kept inequality from rising in South Africa. If grants were not available, income inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient would have been 0.74 instead of 0.69 in 2014 (Bhorat and Cassim 2014). Grants reduce the difference between the incomes of the richest and poorest decile from 61 times greater to 35 times (Kidd et al. 2018). Sixty-nine percent of all cash transfers go to the bottom 40 percent (Inchauste 2015). In 2015, social assistance transfers are estimated to have reduced the poverty headcount rate in South Africa by 8 percent and the poverty gap by about 30 percent (World Bank 2018).

There is substantial evidence to show that grants have contributed to improved outcomes for children in schooling and health (UN 2018; Bastagli et al. 2016). Receipt of benefits in the first two years of life increases the likelihood of a child's growth being monitored by medical professionals. Children in receipt of the grant from birth complete more grades of schooling than children enrolled at six years of age and have significantly higher arithmetic test scores (Davis et al. 2016). Among 15-17 year olds, by keeping young people in school longer, social grants have helped to reduce the risk of HIV infection and the likelihood of early pregnancy among young women (Cluver et al. 2016).

While high levels of political participation, through voting, representation and protest, were discussed in the previous section, it is still worth asking how grants interface with aspects of voice and influence. The inclusion of the right to social security in the Constitution of 1996 has empowered individuals and civil society to claim for their socioeconomic rights and to advocate for their extension (Plagerson et al. 2019). Qualitative and quantitative research has found a positive relationship between grant receipt and perceptions of citizenship, and engagement in democratic processes (Plagerson, Harpham, and Kielmann 2012; Patel, Sadie, and Bryer 2018).

Do social grants engage with horizontal and spatial inequalities distributionally?

Overwhelmingly, social grants disproportionately benefit groups disadvantaged by horizontal and spatial inequalities. In terms of gender, a cursory look would suggest that a similar proportion of men (29 percent) and women (31 percent) receive grants (StatsSA 2017a). However, if the caregivers who receive the grant on behalf of the children in the case of Child Support Grants are considered, the picture is different – while there is a similar proportion of boys and girls who receive the grant, 98 percent of caregivers who receive the CSG on their children's behalf are female. Indeed, social grants have been effective in decreasing gender differences in the extent and depth of poverty (Posel and Rogan 2012). In terms of race, more than one-third of black African individuals (32.9 percent) received a social grant, compared to 27.2 percent of coloured individuals, 11.5 percent of Indian/Asian individuals and 6.2 percent of the white population, reflecting to some extent the poverty gradient by population group. Nationally, in 2015, 71.9 percent of all older persons in South Africa were covered by an Old Age Pension, whereas the coverage rate amongst older poor persons (as defined by the upper-bound poverty line¹) was notably higher at 92.2 percent. The proportion of older females receiving an old-age grant was 77.2 percent and 94.5 percent for poor older females (StatsSA 2017b). Child Support Grants are received by 34.3 percent of all South African households with children and 61.3 percent of poor households with children. This figure is considerably higher for households headed by females (71.3 percent) highlighting a positive engagement of grants

with intersecting inequalities. Overall, 65 percent of persons with a severe disability and 23 percent of persons without a disability receive a social grant. Furthermore, around 80 percent of persons with a severe disability live in a household receiving at least one social grant, compared to 60 percent of those households with no disabled members (Kidd et al. 2018). With regard to spatial inequalities, the highest percentage of grants are received in provinces with the highest rates of poverty, the Eastern Cape and Limpopo (StatsSA 2017b).

These findings highlight that coverage is high and that the design and delivery of social assistance in South Africa has been sensitive to some degree to vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities. Grants have been able to overcome some of the cultural, social and economic barriers faced by excluded groups, that might have prevented them from accessing the cash transfers. For example, in the case of grants coverage by province, the figures suggest that the administrative and operational structures of social assistance have made it possible, despite the added infrastructural, transport, documentation barriers faced in poorer regions, for large proportions of the population to access the grants. However, some barriers to access still remain, especially in the case of the disability grant, given the complexity of the medical assessment process (Kidd et al. 2018).

With regard to adequacy, the larger pension and disability grants have served to de-cluster to some extent the effect of low or no wage incomes from other forms of disadvantage, particularly for older persons and persons with disability. However, inequality and poverty rates remain extremely high, particularly in the case of children. While disability benefits can help households meet their basic needs, they fall short of covering the costs of disability-related expenses. Nor are they sufficient to replace wages, even though the inability to work is often set as a condition for payment (Kidd et al. 2018).

Do social grants engage with horizontal inequalities relationally?

The previous section showed how social grants have emphatically engaged with horizontal inequalities, and restrained shifts towards even greater distributional disparities in access to resources and opportunities. Further questions motivated by the SDGs concern whether social grants directly engage with the discriminatory sources of horizontal inequalities and help to create a ‘community of care’ rather than indifference (Wolff and De-Shalit 2007).

The evidence regarding how social grants engage with social inclusion is fragmented, and not collected systematically. It includes findings at a societal level, as well as intra-household relations and community level interactions. The post-apartheid legal inclusion of the right to social security in the Constitution, together with its commitment to non-sexism and non-racism and its focus on the most vulnerable, establish a crucial relational/distributional nexus. Court rulings in line with a constitutional mandate, and effective advocacy by vocal and active citizens for the extension of social security rights have conveyed a sense of congruence between distributional and relational gains. Social rights pertaining to social assistance (cash transfers), education, health and housing are widely supported and enjoy widespread legitimacy (Plagerson et al. 2019). For historically excluded groups, official recognition of their rights has a significant symbolic value and demonstrates an explicit political commitment to greater equity and social inclusion (UN 2018, Plagerson, Harpham, and Kielmann 2012). The relative generosity, administrative simplicity and transparency of the means tests have supported the Constitutional notion of inclusion: they do not try to identify the poorest but, rather, to exclude the more affluent.

There are however several factors that oppose these gains. Political and social discourses that label transfers as handouts and caution against dependency have been present but have remained contained by a broader inclusive narrative. Yet, they signal the dynamic nature of social inclusion and the need for sustained action to preserve achievements. Recent corruption scandals in the administration of social grants have brought to light that political and economic elites over the past five to ten years have usurped their progressive mandate and threaten to compromise both relational and distributive gains (Bhorat et al. 2017).⁴

With regard to gender, old age and disability, grants have been associated with increased status within households and communities (Plagerson and Ulriksen 2015). Dignity is a common theme in the narratives of CSG beneficiaries, who feel validated in their personal, caring and social roles (Hochfeld and Plagerson 2011). Within communities, social grants have been associated with increased capabilities to fulfil societal roles, through participation in burial societies, savings groups, community forums and engagement with political processes (Plagerson and Ulriksen 2015). Yet, despite the empowering impacts for women, fear of gender-based violence remains very high within many households (Patel et al. 2012). Within communities and in the media, the CSG has been associated with gender discrimination in ways that can undermine beneficiaries' and children's rights to social security. Negative discourses construct women as self-serving, irresponsible and a drain on resources, despite a large body of evidence to the contrary (Surender et al. 2010; Hochfeld and Plagerson 2017). These discourses may stigmatise women for relying on grants, engendering a lack of cultural and social value for them despite their substantial social contributions via both informal productive labour and unpaid caring work (Hochfeld and Plagerson 2017).

Overall, grants have widespread support and legitimacy that cut across the lines of discrimination that underlie many dimensions of inequality. In many communities they support social networks, and raise the status of underprivileged groups. Generally, grants are not associated with negative racial discourses. However, popular discourses around dependency which are linked to vertical inequality distributions are present and are vulnerable to decreased trust in state institutions.

Does social assistance engage with drivers of intersectional inequalities?

Grants interact with labour markets and the care economy in several, in part related, ways. In terms of labour market participation, there are no grants that specifically target men and women of working age, even though the majority of the unemployed fall outside the scope of social insurance benefits. With regard to available grants, evidence has ruled out negative interactions with grants for working age adults (Bastagli et al. 2016). Even in the case of disability grants, which are dependent on the applicant being 'unfit to work', there is again no clear evidence that this has created a negative incentive but it does raise questions about why disability benefits are not used to actively support people into, and during, employment (Kidd et al. 2018).

⁴ Revelations over the past two years have revealed 'state capture' on an extraordinary scale. With regard to social grants, since 2014, events have highlighted the vulnerability of the South African Social Security Agency to political interference, which has overridden the benefits of its previously well-regarded administrative independence. Ministerial intrusion sanctioned the irregular appointment of a private service provider to implement social assistance delivery mechanisms. The courts have been forced to intervene in a case which has pitted an efficient but overly profit-driven, exploitative, illegitimate and politically protected service provider against the appointment of a publically mandated institution (the South African post office) with insecure administrative credentials.

There are some indications that, despite a lack of active policy linkages, cash transfers can lead to better employment opportunities for members of poor households because they support childcare and job-related migration, particularly among women (Plagerson and Ulriksen 2015). However, grants do not significantly contribute to a reduction in wage inequality. Grants comprise 71 percent of incomes in the poorest quintile (World Bank 2018). They thus serve to attenuate income inequality, but do not directly challenge labour income disparities as a driver of income inequality.

With regard to care, grants (in particular Child Support Grants) act in contrasting ways. On one hand they recognise and support women's care-giving role and to a small extent support labour participation for women (via migration and childcare support), but at the same time they reinforce traditional divisions of labour. Care activities remain overwhelmingly the responsibility of women in CSG households (the majority of whom remain at the margins of the labour market), leading to time poverty, a large domestic work burden and limited mobility, eased to some extent by municipal services such as piped water and electricity (Patel, Hochfeld, and Moodley 2013). A lack of a fundamental shift in gender relations is confirmed by the changing patterns of childcare, redistributed between women within the extended household and across generations, rather than between men and women. Overall, the CSG has not served to significantly shift the boundaries and social expectations around care responsibilities (Plagerson, Hochfeld, and Stuart 2018).

Combined, these findings suggest that grants offset the outcomes caused by these drivers of inequality, and to some degree operate as a 'fertile functioning', leading to gains across resources, opportunities and participation outcomes. However, they do not directly push back or reverse the corrosive mechanisms underlying labour market and care dynamics and are insufficient alone to help people permanently escape from poverty.

Conclusion

The centrality of inequality in the SDGs generates an ambitious but also malleable global mandate. Several key points emerge from the discussion on this paper. Firstly, the SDGs place the relational and distributive dimensions of inequality on the same page and draw attention to their potential to converge but also to be in conflict with each other. An understanding of vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities supports both diagnostic and intervention research that can address vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities in a cohesive way.

Secondly, the example of South Africa demonstrates the inter-related effects of vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities, and the need for sustained and integrated distributional and relational interventions. For more than two decades, South Africa has sought to address poverty and inequality with a wide range of initiatives, including social assistance to vulnerable households and individuals, and has successfully restrained its increases. Yet inequality has remained the highest in the world, particularly with regard to access to resources. Despite improvements, income inequality still reflect age, gender and race disparities.

Thirdly, it is important to discuss which questions can helpfully guide an evaluation of the distributional and relational impacts of an intervention such as social assistance. Descriptively, disaggregated data can respond to the question of whether vertical, horizontal and spatial

inequalities are addressed. The paper has shown that social grants in South Africa have had significant effects in curbing vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities. In some cases, grants have contributed to a de-clustering of income disadvantage from other forms of disadvantage, such as access to education for children with disabilities. Analytically, several questions have supported a discussion of whether the drivers of inequality that interlock vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities together are addressed. In South Africa, constitutional guarantees have ensured that social assistance acts on both relational and distributional aspects of inequality. In many ways, social grants represent a fertile functioning, with positive outcomes in education, health and women's empowerment. However, their ability to reverse patterns of corrosive disadvantage in the labour markets and economy of care has been limited.

Fourthly, an integrated analysis can help to identify gaps for further action. While fiscal space is limited and it is important to be realistic about what social protection can and can't achieve, nonetheless the analysis of inequalities can support effective allocation of resources and strengthening of intersectoral linkages. The persistent and severe levels of poverty among children, coupled with evidence showing that grants can support job-seeking behaviour, but do not fundamentally tackle unequal gender dynamics on the distribution of care responsibilities, and that access to services has reduced the burden of domestic work for women, can point to several policy implications. The combined analysis of vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities could support both increases in the amount of the CSG to satisfy adequacy criteria, but also interventions which target the discriminatory barriers at play. In this direction, policy-makers are giving attention to ways of combining cash and care as a way of achieving inclusion for children. Measures that can provide quality childcare, strengthen families, tackle sexism and gender-biased attitudes towards social protection, labour participation and care need to be scaled-up (UN Women 2015). Consistent, evidence-based and well-funded interventions which integrate affiliation and material provision for children and counter indifference in public and political attitudes towards children are also necessary (Manderson and Block 2016).

The SDGs provide a wide angle lens for a study of vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities within countries, and support interventions which tackle both relational and distributional dimensions of inequality. In the case of South Africa, social assistance has contributed towards equality of resources and opportunity, and improved the ability of those most at risk of being left behind to manage risks and cope with shocks, but not yet to the point where reliance on grants can be reduced. The SDGs highlight the redistributive and inclusive achievements of the grants, and serve to motivate sustained action, with increased targeted measures in some cases, and continual attention to monitoring the extent and causes of intersecting inequalities.

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