

Public Administration **CHALLENGES:** Cases from Africa

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A POLICY INSTRUMENT TO RELIEVE CHILD POVERTY: THE CASE OF THE CHILD SUPPORT GRANT IN SOUTH AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

Citizenship is globally associated with membership of a society based on equality, inherent dignity and rights. Central to the value of inherent dignity is the right to social security and an adequate standard of living (UN General Assembly 1948: arts 22 and 25). In the South African context, the 1996 Constitution not only affirms everyone's right to access social security and, where necessary, appropriate social assistance, but rules that the state 'take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of each of these rights' (RSA 1996a: s 27). In addition, the Constitution affirms the right of every child to family, parental or alternative care, 'basic nutrition, shelter, basic healthcare services and social services' (RSA 1996a: s 28). Since the adoption of the Constitution in 1996, the South African government has introduced several measures towards realising these rights, of which the establishment of the child support grant (CSG) in 1998 is probably the most noteworthy (DSD, SSASSA & UNICEF 2011: 1).

Since the inception of the CSG as a policy instrument, various studies have been conducted to assess the success of this policy intervention (DSD et al 2011; DSD, SASSA & UNICEF 2012; Coetzee 2013; Kang'ethe, Mundau & Manomano 2015; Patel, Knijn & Van Wel 2015; Wright, Neves, Ntshongwana & Noble 2015; UNICEF, DSD & SASSA 2016). These studies generally reported positively on the benefits and positive impact of the CSG, with specific reference

1 I acknowledge the contributions of Prof Liezel Lues and Ms Mangalane du Toit to this chapter.

to the child beneficiaries (Coetzee 2013: 427), the caregivers' decision-making about finances related to children in their care (Patel et al 2015: 19), the promotion of developmental outcomes, and a reduction in high-risk behaviours that render adults vulnerable to HIV infection (UNICEF et al 2016: 1). The review of the White Paper on Social Welfare revealed

a widespread recognition of the role played by grants in reducing the depth of severe poverty ... in mitigating child poverty, contributing to child development, improving health and education outcomes, and reducing risky adolescent behaviour (DSD 2016a: 224).

South African society enshrined the globally treasured value of the dignity of human beings and care for society's vulnerable members (such as children) in the Constitution of 1996 (RSA 1996a: ss 27 and 28). Soon after the adoption of the Constitution, the South African government proceeded to employ measures towards achieving those valued rights. Furthermore, the wealth of rigorous assessments referred to above has revealed that the CSG is widely regarded as a highly successful measure as a policy instrument. In fact, a comprehensive qualitative research report depicts the CSG as 'a rare example in Africa of a comprehensive social grant programme for poor children' (DSD et al 2011: 1), which provides ample justification for selecting this policy instrument as a rare case of a successful policy instrument. Whereas the scholarly literature reporting on public policy failures may be ample, it does not imply that public policy successes are rare (see Compton & 't Hart 2019: 12, 78). The purpose of this study was to make sense of the South African CSG policy instrument as a case of successful policy intervention.

In doing so, this chapter narrates the chronology of this policy instrument since it was conceived in 1997 up to its state of existence in the financial year 2019/2020. This historical narrative is followed by a brief overview of the various studies undertaken on the CSG, their points of focus and their findings. From these findings a summary is deduced from both the success factors of this intervention and those challenges preventing the intervention from developing to its full potential. Finally, this chapter reports on the application of appropriate theoretical lenses in an attempt to make sense of this instance of a policy success story. The next section reports on the methodological approach selected for the study on which this chapter is based.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The South African CSG policy instrument that was selected as the case for this study is regarded as an instance of a successful policy instrument. For the purposes of this chapter, it is argued that a policy instrument is determined by certain antecedents such as specific policy aims, objectives, and targets, in addition to coherent and carefully calibrated eligibility criteria, constituted within a larger framework of ‘governance modes and policy regime logics’ (Howlett 2009: 73). The implication is that a complex policy problem can hardly be solved through a single policy instrument (Head 2010: 83) but requires a set of policy instruments serving a coalition of policy interests (Howlett 2019: 418). The CSG is therefore an instance of a policy instrument embedded in a framework of related policy instruments that serve a complex coalition of policy interests.

This instance is also context-specific, which makes a comparison with other instances and other geographical and temporal contexts challenging. Considering the apparent lack of standard theoretical frameworks for describing and explaining successful policy instruments, a qualitative approach in the interpretive research tradition was therefore selected to make sense of this case. The material necessary to studying this case proved to be exclusively of a documentary nature, including scholarly and official documents.

In order to select the most appropriate research reports on the CSG, and social grants in general, a search was done on Google Scholar using the search terms ‘child support grant’; this resulted in 6 510 hits. The search was refined with additional search terms, such as ‘review’ and ‘South Africa’, which led to 4 100 hits. The search was further refined by exploring the work of scholars specialising in this field, reports by specialised research units and reviews conducted under the auspices of the Department of Social Development (DSD) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). Furthermore, keyword-directed searches were also performed through the search facilities of scholarly journals such as *Development Southern Africa*, the *International Journal of Social Welfare* and the *Journal of Social Policy*. The official source material for this study consists of regulatory documents (eg the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996 and various relevant national and provincial legislation and regulations), policy documents (eg the so-called Green Papers and White Papers), relevant government planning documents and the annual reports of government departments.

While the various categories of documented material were not read in the pure systematic manner of systematic reviews (see Parkhurst 2017: 17), a hermeneutical reading process (De Beer 2014: 211–213) was applied to answer the typical sense-making question of ‘What is happening?’ (Weick 1993: 633). To understand what happened with the CSG intervention, the hermeneutical reading modality was

applied to the various texts to gain the meaning of a specific text, the intention of the author and the possible context-specific dimensions of the meaning of these texts (see De Beer 2014: 212). In the search for a deepened understanding of the texts, it was imperative to take note of the conceptual context of this instance of policy intervention. Three concepts served as the sense-making context: ‘social security’, ‘social protection’ and ‘social assistance’ (Du Toit & Lues 2014: 43; Plagerson, Hochfeld & Stuart 2019: 294). The implication of this conceptual context is that the concept ‘child support grant’ refers to the phenomenon in the overlapping contexts of social protection, social security and social assistance interventions. It is therefore studied as an instance of a social security measure ‘designed to protect individuals and families against income insecurity’ (Plagerson et al 2019: 294) caused by a variety of contingencies predominantly beyond the individual’s or family’s control. However, as a specific category of social security measure – a social assistance instrument – the CSG is ‘a non-contributory form of social security, which provides support in cash, or in kind, to individuals who lack the means to support themselves’ (Du Toit & Lues 2014: 43). With this conceptual context in mind, the next section reports on the chronology of this policy instrument since it was first introduced in 1992 up to its current state of existence in the financial year of 2019/2020.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE CHILD SUPPORT GRANT AS A POLICY INSTRUMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

Whereas the philosophical grounding of a CSG in South Africa is usually derived from sections 27 and 28 of the Constitution of 1996 (RSA 1996a), legislative provision for such a grant in South Africa was already made in the Social Assistance Act 59 of 1992 (RSA 1992). Section 2(d) of this Act provided for a CSG to a primary caregiver of a child ‘who is under the age of seven years or such higher age as the Minister may determine by notice in the *Gazette*’ (RSA 1992: s 2(d)).

Shortly after the adoption of the Constitution on 8 May 1996 (RSA 1996a), the Welfare Laws Amendment Act 106 of 1996 was adopted, among other purposes, to amend the definition of ‘welfare organisation’ in the Social Assistance Act of 1992 and broaden authorised financial awards to unregistered, non-profitable organisations rendering social welfare services (RSA 1996b: s 6). A further amendment of this Act was approved on 27 November 1997 (RSA 1997: s 3) to refine the measures provided for social assistance and the scope of the Social Assistance Act.

After the commencement of the new democratic dispensation in 1994, various measures related to child support were implemented almost simultaneously in

two distinct but related policy streams: the development of a population policy and the development of a welfare policy. In April 1995, the population policy stream took the first step with the publication of a public discussion document entitled ‘A Green Paper for Public Discussion: Population Policy for South Africa?’ (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development 1995). More than 700 written submissions were received from a broad spectrum of stakeholders (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development 1998a: v). These submissions informed the Draft White Paper for a Population Policy for South Africa, published on 31 October 1996 (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development 1996a). This Draft White Paper provides the population policy context for child support, emphasising that the ‘overall well-being of children should be given the highest priority by government’ (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development 1996a: 24). Following the subsequent refinement process of this policy document, the final White Paper on Population Policy was published on 7 September 1998 with the vision

to contribute towards the establishment of a society that provides a high and equitable quality of life for all South Africans in which population trends are commensurate with sustainable socio-economic and environmental development (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development 1998a: 45).

This White Paper, while not referring to the Lund Committee discussed in the next paragraph, echoed the sentiments of that committee by highlighting the dismal state of ‘poor household food security, inadequate childcare provision, lack of education and information, inadequate health services and an unhealthy living environment’ and the concomitant need to prioritise a ‘focus on the eradication of poverty and increased access to basic services’ (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development 1998a: 23).

In December 1995 the Lund Committee on Child and Family Support was convened to advise policymakers on equitable policy alternatives (Lund 2016: 8; Patel & Plageron 2016a: 39). The committee submitted its report and recommendations in August 1996 (Lund 2016: 8). The main policy purpose identified by this committee was improved nutritional support for children in their earliest years (Lund 2016: 8). While the committee’s proposals were not mentioned in any of the White Papers discussed in this section, their recommendations proved to be fundamental to the CSG introduced in 1998 (Hall & Budlender 2016: 34). However, a few months before the submission of the Lund report, the Ministry for Welfare and Population Development published the

Draft White Paper for Social Welfare on 2 February 1996 (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development 1996b). This Draft White Paper acknowledged that ‘the greatest demand for social assistance will be felt in future’ from the need of poor black women for child-aid and family-care benefits (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development 1996b: 77). The White Paper for Social Welfare, which was subsequently published on 8 August 1997, did not attend specifically to a CSG as a policy instrument, but focused on the family as the most suitable context for attending to the primary needs of children (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development 1997: 53).

The amended Social Assistance Act 59 of 1992 continued to provide for a CSG for any person meeting the requirements of the Act (RSA 1992: s 4; 1997: s 3). Furthermore, section 19 of the Act provided for the minister to make regulations related to the nature of grants, the application for, payment of, conditions for and control over the payments (RSA 1992: s 19). Subsequently, on 9 February 1998, the Minister for Welfare and Population Development invited the public to submit written comments on the draft regulations regarding grants, social relief of distress and financial awards in terms of the Social Assistance Act 59 of 1992 (Department of Welfare 1998). On 31 March 1998, this publication was followed by the publication of regulations regarding grants and financial awards to welfare organisations and persons in need of social relief from distress in terms of the Social Assistance Act 59 of 1992 (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development 1998b). These regulations came into force on 1 April 1998, a date marking not only the end of policy agenda-setting, formulation and decision-making, but also the official birth of the CSG as a policy instrument. Therefore, it was the start of the policy programme stream (Howlett 2019: 418, 420), with a primary focus on implementation and evaluation.

The CSG was rolled out in 1998, with approximately 22 000 beneficiaries (Streak 2011: 282; Naidu 2014: 4). This specific policy programme stream then unfolded mainly during two periods: the pre-agency period (1998–2004) and the agency period (2004 and beyond).

The pre-agency period is characterised by minor changes to the policy instrument announced on 31 March 1998. The period following the official introduction of the CSG as a policy instrument appears to be stable, with only minor amendments being effected to the regulations. These amendments were mostly to enhance clarity in the formulation of the regulations and nuanced amendments to eligibility criteria (DSD 2001). A noteworthy amendment was that of the age criterion. While the Act defines a child as ‘any person under the age of 18 years’ (RSA 1992: s 1), the specified Regulation 3(2)(i)(aa) states that the CSG is made in respect of a child ‘under the age of seven years’ (Ministry

for Welfare and Population Development 1998b: Regulation 3(2)(i)(aa)). The amendments to the regulations published on 31 March 2003 implied a phased-in approach by gradually lifting the age eligibility requirement to nine years (1 April 2003), 11 years (1 April 2004) and 14 years (1 April 2005). A Constitutional Court ruling in the case of *Khosa v Minister of Social Development* on 4 March 2004 (Constitutional Court of South Africa 2004) probably opened the door to the inclusion of children up to 18 years of age in the CSG (Jansen van Rensburg 2005), which was realised in a phased-in manner.

The number of eligible children per caregiver has also been slightly adapted (DSD 2003: Regulation 3). Moreover, this period reflected a sharp increase in the number of beneficiaries of this grant: from 27 577 in March 1999 to 2 630 826 in March 2003 (see Table 1). The first period is therefore characterised by fine-tuning an evidently stable policy programme and the broad implementation of this programme.

Table 1: The number of CCG beneficiaries by province from 1999 to 2003

Province	March 1999	March 2000	September 2001	May 2002	31 March 2003
EC	5 670	55 717	206 394	277 939	405 815
FS	1 675	13 753	71 240	107 242	150 480
Gaut	1 872	47 910	149 843	209 399	315 897
KZN	7 853	66 836	352 630	507 302	694 392
Limp	2 384	53 815	159 989	301 289	456 882
Mpa	630	28 327	102 327	134 172	199 834
NW	1 662	31 792	125 176	166 849	206 421
NC	2 255	12 805	24 824	35 505	46 412
WC	3 576	10 951	89 268	155 962	204 534
Total	27 577	321 906	1 281 691	1 895 659	2 630 826

Source: Streak 2011: 282

The second period that commenced in 2004 kicked off with the adoption of two critical legislative instruments, namely, the Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004 and the South African Social Security Agency Act 9 of 2004. While the Social Assistance Act commenced only on 1 April 2006 (RSA 2004a), the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) Act commenced on 15 November 2004 (RSA 2004b). This date marked the legal birth of SASSA and the de-facto start of the agency period. The adoption of these two key legislative measures in the context of social grants and the CSG was followed by another period of aligning and refining the regulations in order to streamline the implementation of these Acts.

A first step was the publication of regulations in terms of the Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004. This occurred on 22 February 2005 (DSD 2005), about 19 months before the official commencement date of the Act. While the new regulations proved fundamentally similar to the previous regulations, their structure and formulation were based on the benefits of the implementation experiences of the preceding years. Concerning the eligibility requirements of the CSG, Regulation 4(4)(a) ruled that the child in respect of whom this grant is made must be ‘under the age of 14 years’ (DSD 2005: Regulation 4(4)(a)).

The year 2008 marked the repealing of the regulations mentioned above and their replacement with a new set of regulations which, with a few exceptions, came into effect on 23 August 2008 (DSD 2008). These regulations were published with annexures reflecting procedures for financial eligibility criteria for the different grants. With regard to the CSG, the age criterion was lifted again, this time to include ‘a child not older than 15 years’ (DSD 2008: Regulation 6(4)). These regulations also provided a revised means test as part of the eligibility criteria, accountable, according to some researchers, for an

additional 1,7 million children becoming eligible for the grant, while the changes to age eligibility will increase the number of beneficiaries by an additional 2,5 million children between 2008 and 2015 (McEwen & Woolard 2012: 155).

The age criterion was revised in the amendments published on 27 November 2009 providing for a phased-in approach of ‘under the age of 16 years’ (from 1 January 2010), ‘under the age of 17 years’ (from 1 January 2011) and ‘under the age of 18’ (from 1 January 2012) (DSD 2009: Regulation 6(1)(a)).

Minor amendments to the regulations followed in 2010 (DSD 2010), while new maximum monthly social grant amounts were published in 2011 (DSD 2011a). Several additional fine-tuning amendments to the regulations were published in the years to follow (DSD 2012, 2014a, b, 2015a, 2016b, 2018a, 2019, 2020). Furthermore, the department gave public notice that SASSA ‘has entered into an agreement with the South African Post Office’ for the payment of social grants to beneficiaries (DSD 2018b: 42). The total number of beneficiaries of grants during this period increased from 4 446 230 in April 2004 to 9 465 952 in February 2010 (see Table 2); it increased again from 10 371 950 in 2011 (SASSA 2016: 27) to 12 452 072 in 2019 (SASSA 2019: 26), but the increase was not as steep during this period (2004–2019) as during the previous period.

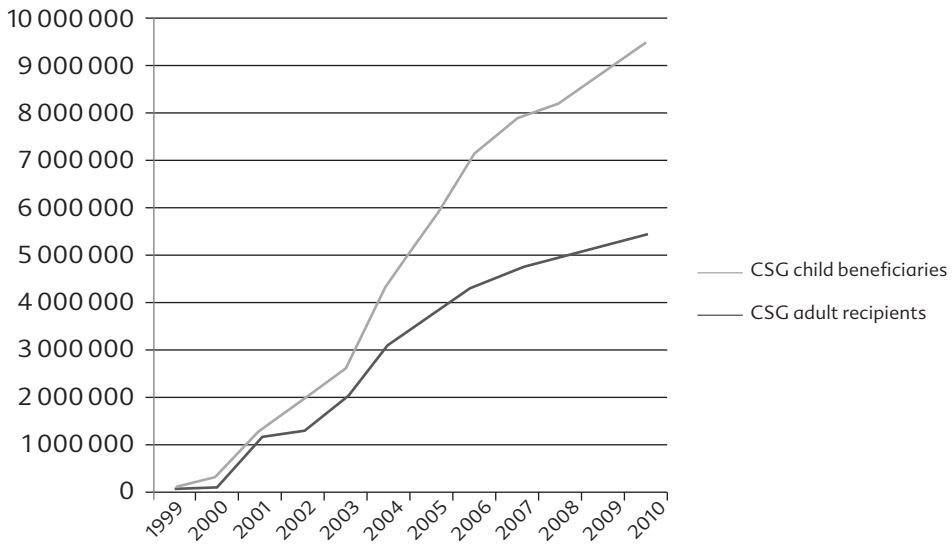
Table 2: The number of CSG beneficiaries by province from 2004 until 2010

Province	April 2004	April 2005	April 2006	April 2007	April 2008	April 2009	February 2010
EC	747 838	1 032 201	1 379 325	1 482 450	1 481 128	1 575 528	1 653 020
FS	249 439	328 350	405 321	436 192	454 150	473 141	521 207
Gaut	558 358	696 991	843 745	912 920	959 139	1 031 785	1 137 998
KZN	1 085 447	1 287 851	1 651 827	1 942 365	2 102 775	2 297 520	2 412 293
Limp	740 937	955 630	1 175 221	1 249 443	1 274 823	1 364 184	1 443 223
Mpa.	371 463	468 987	598 787	641 068	657 534	696 614	742 944
NW	351 867	457 953	581 014	648 558	631 499	666 259	715 898
NC	71 703	94 830	116 887	128 658	182 225	202 630	221 052
WC	269 178	344 327	418 437	451 215	474 385	525 014	618 317
Total	4 446 230	5 667 120	7 170 564	7 892 869	8 217 658	8 832 675	9 465 952

Source: Streak 2011: 282

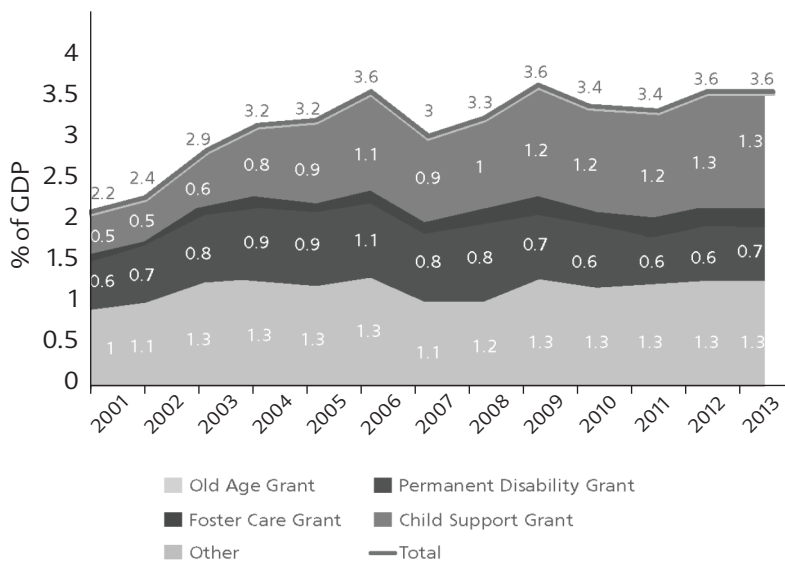
Most related social grants have been shown to have an individual focus, but research on the implementation of these grants has revealed that, in practice, they became household grants from which the entire family benefits (cf Samson, Heinrich, Williams, Kaniki, Muzondo, Quene & Van Niekerk 2008; Centre for Social Development in Africa 2017: 6). However, it seems to be essential to make a distinction between grant recipients (the primary child-caregivers receiving the grant) and beneficiaries (those children on whose behalf the grant is received). Figure 1 illustrates that the number of child beneficiaries has increased faster than the number of recipients – an indication of the family context within which these grants are received. The family is the context not only for the CSG, but also for other grants in the social assistance policy sphere, including the Old Age Grant, the Foster Care Grant and the Permanent Disability Grant. Moreover, while expenditure on the CSG has grown to approximately 1,3% of the GDP, the total expenditure on social assistance amounted to about 3,6% of the GDP in 2013 (see Figure 2). This percentage has probably declined recently, as SASSA reported in their 2018–2019 Annual Report that the ZAR163 billion spent by the South African government, according to the Minister of Social Development, represented ‘about 3% of the country’s GDP’ (SASSA 2019: 8). It is also estimated that almost 30% of the South African population and 44% of all households received social assistance in 2017 (SASSA 2019: 25).

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Source: Streak 2011: 283

Figure 1: Number of CSG recipients and beneficiaries from 1999 until 2010



Source: DSD 2017: 23

Figure 2: Social assistance expenditure expressed as a percentage of the GDP from 2001 until 2013

The Green Paper on families published in 2011 was therefore a highly appropriate contextual policy contribution to the CSG intervention (DSD 2011b). It is subsequently argued in this Green Paper that

focusing on the family would have more far-reaching positive societal outcomes than the current targeting of individuals and the fragmented approach which usually overlooks the family as a unit (DSD 2011b: 19).

Moreover, in the family and household context, the CSG has been lauded by institutions such as the Centre for Social Development in Africa (2017: 6) as ‘the country’s flagship poverty reduction programme for children’.

Several other policy and planning initiatives, launched by the DSD and other government departments, enriched the immediate context of the CSG. The most noteworthy is the National Development Plan: Vision for 2030 (National Planning Commission 2011), the Framework for Social Development (DSD 2013), and the Draft Early Childhood Development Policy (DSD 2015b). Although these policy initiatives have been introduced separately, they have proven to be complementary to one another in the broader context of caring for vulnerable families.

This section provided an overview of the gradual development of the CSG as the flagship programme of social assistance. The next section reports on the sense-making process by reviewing some of the research conducted on the CSG as a policy programme in South Africa.

MAKING SENSE OF THE CSG AS A CASE OF A SUCCESSFUL POLICY INTERVENTION

While the previous section narrated the development of the South African Child Support Programme since the idea of such a grant was conceived in the early 1990s, this section reports on an effort to make sense of this policy implementation programme. The sense-making process has been informed by the rich collection of research reports on this programme and structured according to a conceptual framework suggested by Walker and Avant (2014). This framework provides for four concept categories: the context, the defining attributes, the antecedents and the consequences (Wessels 2019: 3–5). While reading through the selected research reports, four themes were used as questions: (a) What is the context of this specific study? (b) What are the defining attributes of a CSG? (c) What are the antecedents of a CSG? and (d) What are the expected consequences of such a grant? These themes are discussed below and summarised in Table 3.

What is the context of this specific study?

The South African CSG is embedded in a rich and complex philosophical and empirical context. As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, the deep-rooted ideas and values related to equality, inherent dignity and the rights of human beings serve as the ultimate lens in obtaining some clarity on the complicated and messy phenomenon of this case study. The idea of context is informed, among other measures, by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN General Assembly 1948), the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA 1996a), other legislation and regulations as referred to earlier in this chapter, and also the various policy documents developed by the government in its distinct spheres. The empirical context of this study, particularly of this specific instance of a policy instrument (namely the CSG), is the time (starting from about the early 1990s and ending in about 2020) and place (South Africa, Africa and the rest of the world). A further context of this study is the citizens of this country; specifically, their families and the fact that the poverty rate in South Africa has gradually increased since 2011 (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development 2018). This context has been eloquently described in the White Paper for Social Welfare as the dismal state of ‘poor household food security, inadequate childcare provision, lack of education and information, inadequate health services and an unhealthy living environment’ (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development 1998a: 23). This context lends a specific meaning to the concept ‘child support grant’ and its defining attributes.

What are the defining attributes of a CSG?

The context, as discussed above, offers a description of the CSG as being a social security measure ‘designed to protect individuals and families against income insecurity’ (Plagerson et al 2019: 294) or a non-contributory social assistance instrument, ‘which provides support in cash, or in kind, to individuals who lack the means to support themselves’ (Du Toit & Lues 2014: 43). Following these attempts to depict this concept, a review of the various research reports on the CSG revealed four main defining attributes of the concept and the phenomenon it refers to:

- the non-contributory nature of the programme (Leisering & Barrientos 2013; Du Toit & Lues 2014: 43; Plagerson et al 2019: 296);
- the unconditional cash transfer (Gomersall 2013: 528; Heinrich, Hoddinott & Samson 2017: 623; Moodley, Chiba & Patel 2018: 4);
- the individual child as the beneficiary (Dinbabo 2011: 279; Moodley, Chiba & Patel 2018: 1); and
- an adult caregiver as a recipient (Case, Hosegood & Lund 2005: 469; Patel et al 2015: 377).

All four of these attributes are necessary for policy intervention to be regarded as a CSG. The published work on the CSG also revealed that the inherent meaning and success of this programme depend on a variety of antecedents which need to be in place for this programme to exist.

What are the antecedents of a child support grant?

For the purposes of this study, antecedents are viewed as ‘those events or incidents that must occur or be in place prior to the occurrence of the concept’ (Walker & Avant 2014: 173). Antecedents are therefore something that may cause or influence the nature of a CSG or one of its attributes. The reviewed literature revealed the existence of several antecedents necessary for the CSG to be successful, such as the presence of basic services, effective targeting, appropriate eligibility criteria, affordability, political importance and an effective implementation administration.

Considering that the CSG is a policy instrument, it is logically implied that a necessary antecedent should be a well-developed policy regime within which policy uncertainty is minimised (see World Bank Group 2018a). The concept ‘policy regime’ refers to ‘the approach that is being used to address a problem or set of problems’ (May & Jochim 2013: 428). In the context of this study, it refers to all social security and social assistance legislation, regulations, Green Papers and White Papers which had a direct influence on the direction of this chronology.

The research by Moodley, Chiba and Patel (2018: 1) identified the need for resources such as basic services to supplement a household income as an antecedent for the CSG to be successful. In addition, a study by Ngubane and Maharaj (2018: 1) highlighted the existence of appropriate and youth-friendly basic services as an antecedent to a successful CSG programme. These basic services are therefore not contextual variables but necessary conditions for the CSG to be successful.

An appropriate and effective targeting mechanism for identifying and including eligible individual beneficiaries and recipients in the programme was found to be a widely researched antecedent (Hall & Budiender 2016: 37; Mogotsi & Senona 2016: 88–89; Patel & Plagerson 2016b). Closely related to the targeting antecedent is the need for clear and appropriate eligibility criteria for targeting and including beneficiaries and recipients in the grant programme. Some of the research focused on the complexity related to the eligibility of adult caregivers (Hall & Proudlock 2011) and the reasons why eligible primary caregivers do not apply for the CSG (Du Toit & Lues 2014: 52). The effect of these criteria (eg age, means test) and their amendment on the CSG and its constituent attributes form a constantly researched theme (Case et al 2005: 467; McEwen & Woolard 2012; Du Toit & Lues 2014: 52).

Related to the antecedents of targeting and eligibility is the antecedent of the affordability of social assistance (Seekings 2016: 1). The expansion of this policy programme depends on the financial position of the country and priority-setting in the budgetary process (Gomersall 2013: 542). Research has specifically revealed the direct relationship between changes in the age eligibility criterion resulting in an increase of the grant uptake, budgetary constraints and the affordability of the programme (McEwen & Woolard 2012: 155).

Whereas a budget is the result of a political process of authoritative allocation and prioritisation of values (Pauw 2014), it makes sense that the most decisive antecedent is probably that of strong political support. This implies that the political importance of the specific programme relative to other government programmes (Seekings 2016: 1), together with the political will to resolve fiscal and implementation challenges, is a necessary condition for a programme such as the CSG (Patel & Plagerson 2016b: 42; Conradie 2018: 5; World Bank Group 2018a: 96). In this regard, it is noteworthy that the Minister for Social Welfare during the period of significant policy advancements, amid concerns about the affordability, was Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, an influential member of the national executive committee of the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC) (Seekings 2016: 8). Minister Fraser-Moleketi was appointed as Deputy Minister of Welfare and Population Development with effect from 6 January 1995 and became minister in the same portfolio from 1 August 1996 until early 1999 (Office of the President 1995, 1996). Her successor in this portfolio was another influential member of the ANC, Zola Skweyiya, who not only injected a new concern about poverty, but took personal leadership in the public discourse on social grants (Seekings 2016: 14). He was the minister of this portfolio until 2009. These two ministers evidently provided the portfolio with political leadership, stability and weight to ensure the implementation of the CSG amid concerns about its affordability.

The last antecedent in this non-exclusive list is that of an effective implementation administration. Noteworthy in this regard is the conclusion by Gomersall that the programme 'is implemented well' (2013: 541) amid main administrative weaknesses such as

slowness in processing identity documents; lack of understanding in the target population and among programme administrators ... and lack of effective procedure to facilitate primary caregivers accessing the benefit immediately after the birth (2013: 536).

It is also striking that, irrespective of the enduring legal proceedings regarding the appointment of a private service-provider by SASSA, the implementation of this programme ensued uninterrupted during the continued growth in the number of beneficiaries.

The literature therefore revealed several antecedents to be considered in an attempt to understand the CSG as a policy programme in South Africa. While not a complete list, these are a fair sample of what has been used in the various studies that focused on this specific programme. The next section attends to the expected consequences of a policy programme such as the CSG.

What are the expected consequences of such a grant?

The consequences of a concept refer to ‘those events or incidents that occur as a result of the occurrence of the concept’ (Walker & Avant 2014: 173). It therefore makes sense that the expected consequences of a social assistance grant such as the CSG are closely related to the purpose of rendering social assistance to eligible persons in the country (RSA 2004a) with the ultimate vision of a ‘caring and self-reliant society’ (DSD 2018c: 9). The Department of Social Development has set itself the task of providing ‘comprehensive, integrated and sustainable social development services’ (of which the CSG is one) to build ‘conscious and capable citizens’ resulting in the transformation of South African society (DSD 2018c: 9). However, these consequential visions were evidently for the entire portfolio of social grant programmes and not for the CSG specifically.

A central, expected consequence of the CSG and related social assistance grants is ‘alleviating (relative and absolute) poverty in South Africa’ (Xaba 2016: 153). In this respect, research by Xaba (2016: 153) found that although the CSG was ‘effective in reducing poverty, particularly amongst children’ it was ‘unable to end poverty’.

In a review of research priorities on the performance of the CSG, Gomersall (2013: 536–539) reports on several consequences of this programme: the achievement of proximal outcome objectives, the achievement of ultimate outcome objectives, and behavioural effects. The proximal outcome, as a consequence, refers to the reduction of poverty in the household in which the beneficiary and recipient lives. Streak (2011: 315) reports that

existing studies suggest that the proximal outcome of the CSG benefit being transferred via primary caregivers to households in which targeted poor children live has largely been achieved.

The ultimate outcome, as a consequence, refers to the reduction in child (the beneficiary) deprivation (Streak 2011: 231, 314–327). Research conducted in the KwaZulu-Natal province found that grant beneficiaries (children)

are significantly more likely to be enrolled in school in the years following grant receipt than are equally poor children of the same age ... Thus the grant appears to help overcome the impact of poverty on school enrolment (Case et al 2005: 467).

Another case study revealed that ‘child support grants are contributing a lot in providing basic needs such as food and clothing to the wellbeing of children’ and that this programme is ‘an effective mechanism in alleviating poverty’ (Gunhidzirai, Makoni & Tanga 2017: 70).

The third consequence identified by Streak (2011) is that of a change of behaviour among grant recipients and grant beneficiaries. In a study on the reduction of adolescent risk behaviours, Heinrich and her team found evidence that cash transfer programmes may contribute to reducing risky behaviours ‘among youth who are vulnerable or at risk because of their poverty’ (Heinrich et al 2017: 644). Informed by this research, they suggested that the government’s decision to lift the age criterion to 18 years, and the subsequent expansion of grant access to children up to adulthood, ‘should improve outcomes for South African adolescents’ (Heinrich et al 2017: 644–645). Another study on the influence of cash grants on the behaviour of grant beneficiaries has shown that child support grants ‘may cover childcare or education costs, therefore allowing mothers to enter the labour force’ (Leibbrandt, Lilenstein, Shenker & Woolard 2013: 1).

Table 3 illustrates the various interlinking concepts at work in an attempt to make sense of this instance of a successful social assistance policy programme.

MAKING SENSE OF THE CSG AS AN INSTANCE OF A SUCCESSFUL POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMME

A review of about 36 studies on the CSG revealed overwhelming agreement that the CSG has been successful in its attempts to overcome the impact of poverty (Case et al 2005; Delany, Ismail, Graham & Ramkissoo 2008; Samson et al 2008; Streak 2011; DSD et al 2012; Patel 2012; Coetzee 2013; Gomersall 2013; Gunhidzirai et al 2017) and the nutritional crises among poor children (Agüero, Carter & Woolard 2007; Samson et al 2008; Patel 2012; Coetzee 2013; Patel, Knijn, Gorman-Smith, Hochfield, Mark, Garthe et al 2017). While the CSG is a programme targeting individual child beneficiaries, it makes sense that the bulk of

Table 3: Antecedents, defining attributes and consequences of a child support grant as a policy programme: A framework for sense-making

Idea context Values (equality, dignity and human rights) Universal Declaration of Human Rights Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996 Legislation Regulations Related policies		Context			Empirical context Time Place Citizens Families Poverty rate Poor household food security Inadequate childcare provision Lack of education and information Inadequate health services Unhealthy living environment
		Antecedents	Defining attributes	Consequences	
		Definition: A non-contributory social assistance instrument which provides financial support to an eligible individual beneficiary and recipient			
		1. Policy regime 2. Basic services 3. Targeting mechanism 4. Eligibility criteria 5. Affordability 6. Political support 7. Implementation administration	1. Non-contributory social assistance instrument 2. Unconditional cash transfers 3. Individual child beneficiary 4. Individual adult caregiver recipient	1. Alleviating of poverty 2. Achievement of proximal outcome objectives 3. Achievement of ultimate outcome objectives 4. Behavioural change	

the studies consulted for this case study focused on the individual child beneficiary as one of the defining attributes of this grant. Furthermore, these specific studies focused on the targeting and eligibility antecedents determining the profile and the number of individual children included in the programme (Case et al 2005; Jansen van Rensburg 2005; Triegaardt 2005; Makiwane, Desmond, Ritcher & Udjo 2006; Mutshaeni 2009; DSD et al 2011; McEwen & Woolard 2012; Patel 2012; Du Toit & Lues 2014). A broad consensus exists among researchers on the appropriateness of the targeting and reach of eligible children as success factors, resulting in the World Bank ‘*The State of Social Safety Nets 2018*’ ranking it as one of the top five programmes in the world (World Bank Group 2018b).

It is with this success factor in mind that the warning of public policy expert Peters (2016) is highly relevant: ‘policy success may be very dangerous for an organization or institution responsible for that policy’ as these successes may result in a policy that ‘becomes locked in’, resulting in more difficult challenges to the policy (Peters 2016: 67). Amid praise for the success of the CSG, hard evidence exists of about 18% of eligible children not being included in this programme (UNICEF et al 2016: 5). These exclusions are attributed to the complexity of two antecedents: the targeting mechanisms and the administrative rules (DSD et al 2012: 26). The reasons for primary care-givers not applying for CSGs identified

in a study by Du Toit and Lues (2014: 44) are attributed to the implementation administration, with specific reference to the application of the means test (therefore the eligibility criteria), the dissemination of information and a lack of trust in the relationship between officials and the primary care-givers. However, these problems are of an operational nature and most probably not the types of challenge Peters had in mind.

From the above one can conclude that the CSG is regarded as successful, irrespective of evidence of the non-inclusion of approximately 18% of eligible beneficiaries caused by targeting and administrative measures – antecedents to which the success of the programme is also attributed. The fact that almost 82% of the eligible beneficiaries are included in the programme is an explicit indication of the ‘clear success’ (Peters 2016: 76) of the targeting (and, by implication, the eligibility criteria) and the administrative implementation of this programme. Peters, however, is concerned that instances of clear success in policy implementation may be more limited than instances of questionable success as ‘questionable success may be a clear opportunity for alternative policy discourses to be debated within the institution’ (Peters 2016: 76). The subsequent question is, therefore: Which aspects of the success of the CSG are not as explicit and measurable as the inclusion figures?

In answering this question, it is worthwhile considering Bovens and ’t Hart’s line of reasoning – that concepts such as ‘success’ and ‘failure’ are not inherent attributes of policy, but ‘rather labels applied by stakeholders and observers’ (Bovens & ’t Hart 2016: 654). These labels are ‘constructed, declared and argued over’ (Bovens & ’t Hart 2016: 654), and are informed by two categories of source in the specific policy instrument: the programmatic and the political. The programmatic source relates to the explicit and measurable, such as inclusion statistics and the amount of money transferred. The political source relates to the ‘world of impressions: lived experiences, stories, frames, counter-frames, heroes and villains’ and are constructed through the perceptions and lived experiences of the diversity of stakeholders of the policy programme (Bovens & ’t Hart 2016: 656). In the case of the CSG, a vast number of assessments, informed by measurable data, confirmed the success of this instance of a non-contributory social assistance instrument of unconditional cash transfers to adult caregiver recipients for the benefit of individual child beneficiaries. The successes appear evident in the consequences of this programme, including the alleviation of poverty, the achievement of proximal and ultimate outcomes, and the change in the behaviours of recipients and beneficiaries. However, despite these successes, the implication of Peters’ concern is that the qualitative research results reporting on the lived experiences of beneficiaries and recipients with respect to a non-

caring implementation administration, complex eligibility criteria and an inadequate targeting mechanism need to be taken seriously for the long-term political sustainability of this programme.

In considering the influence of the seven identified antecedents on the success of this programme, the work of May (2015) is especially enlightening. While the successes or even the failures of the CSG were attributed mainly to three antecedents (targeting mechanism; eligibility criteria; implementation administration), only a few contributions focused on the ‘basic services’, ‘affordability’, ‘specific policy regime’ and ‘political support’ antecedents. May (2015: 278), however, highlights the value of the policy regime perspective as a sense-making instrument to understand the interplay of policy and politics. He describes a policy regime as an approach to ‘the governing arrangements for addressing policy problems’ and therefore the ‘means for converting policy desires into actions that deliver benefits, regulate activities, redistribute resources, and impose burdens’ (May 2015: 280). The anchor attribute of a policy regime is the political means ‘for securing policy legitimacy, coherence, and durability’ (May 2015: 296). While the policy regime and the political support for this programme are perhaps the most influential antecedents, the influence of these antecedents on the CSG is under-researched, resulting in the danger of sense-making attempts reverting to mere speculation.

Even though the necessity for a complementary and supporting system of basic services has been mentioned, the influence of this antecedent on the sustainable success of this programme is evidently also an under-researched area. Finally, while the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the financial health of South Africa and other countries with similar social assistance programmes is still unknown at the time of writing up this research, the long-term affordability of this programme may be at risk. With a significant part of the knowledge territory of the CSG in South Africa still under-researched, it is therefore sensible to take the cautions of Bovens and ‘t Hart (2016: 654) to heart and apply the success label with scholarly care.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the latter discourse on policy implementation failures by attempting to make sense of a South African social assistance policy instrument, namely, the CSG. This case study set out to obtain a deepened understanding of the phenomenon of successful policy instruments; for this reason, an exploratory qualitative approach in the interpretive research tradition was selected to serve this purpose. The material that informed this study

was of a documentary nature, consisting of both scholarly and official documents, and a hermeneutical reading process was applied. From the source material, a chronology of this specific instance of a social assistance programme, namely the CSG, was constructed to span a period of nearly three decades (1992–2020). The chronology revealed the development of an exceptionally stable policy programme, starting with about 20 000 beneficiaries in 1998 and increasing to approximately 12,5 million beneficiaries in 2019. The programme has been described by nearly all research reports as highly successful.

In an attempt to make sense of the reasons for the apparent success, a conceptual framework was designed to understand the interplay between the context, antecedents, defining attributes and consequences of this programme. By applying this framework (see Table 3), and also the theoretical lenses on policy success (Bovens & 't Hart 2016; Peters 2016) and political regime (May 2015) to this specific case, it was possible to obtain a nuanced preliminary understanding of the labels of success attached to this programme. This study has shown that in the context of widespread and deep-rooted poverty, a social assistance policy programme can attain the measurable criteria of its ultimate poverty-alleviating goals. However, the sustainability of such a programme depends on the continued improvement of antecedent factors, such as implementation administration, eligibility criteria and targeting, in addition to the success of other targeted programmes within the same and related policy regimes, sustained affordability and continuing political support.

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