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# **Namibia's Child Welfare Regime, 1990-2017**

Isaac Chinyoka

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About the author:

Dr Isaac Chinyoka completed his PhD at the University of Cape Town in 2018. His PhD, supervised by Jeremy Seekings, examined child welfare regimes in four Southern African countries: South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe. His PhD research was funded primarily by UKAid through the UK's Economic and Social Research Council, grant ES/J018058/1 to Jeremy Seekings, for the "Legislating and Implementing Welfare Policy Reforms" research project.

# Namibia's Child Welfare Regime, 1990-2017

## Abstract

*Most countries in Southern Africa are similar in providing some form of cash transfers to families with children, primarily to reduce child poverty, but there are striking variations in the categories of children targeted and the reach of social grants. Namibia adopted South Africa-like child grants during South Africa rule. Namibia's child welfare regime, like most other regimes in Southern Africa, started with and maintained a strongly familial child welfare regime (CWR), focused on children living in families with only one or no parents present. Whereas South Africa, after its transition to democracy, introduced a Child Support Grant (CSG) - that expanded massively the reach of child grants - Namibia did not do likewise. This paper investigates why Namibia did not follow South Africa's lead, instead expanding pro-poor provision later and more slowly through the Vulnerable Grant, introduced in 2014. Structural factors – including especially AIDS-related demographic changes – intensified need within 'broken families' but the enduring emphasis on familial provision reflected not so much need as domestic politics, especially the electoral dominance of the ruling SWAPO party and a disintegrated and weak domestic civil society. The eventual adoption but slow expansion of a pro-poor grant demonstrates the embrace, by the ruling party SWAPO, of new forms of social protection, facilitated by international development agencies.*

## 1. Introduction

Namibia's child welfare regime (CWR) (and the general welfare regime, broadly) is one of the least researched in Southern Africa, perhaps because Namibia has a small population, and there have been few reforms since programmes were adopted after South African rule. The limited existing literature usefully discusses the provision of Child Welfare Grants (CWGs), and to some limited extent, the effect of indirect programmes on the CWR (Chiripanhura & Niño-Zarazúa, 2013; Levine et al., 2011; Subbarao, 1998; Barrientos et al., 2010). The literature characterises CWGs and other social transfers in terms of their coverage (reach) and generosity, showing the limited coverage of child grants and the overall

welfare regime (Devereux, 2001; Levine et al., 2011:45), without examining the proportion of children covered by the combined programmes (child grants and other indirect schemes). Generosity of transfers is dealt with but not in depth. Authors discuss targeting, showing that child grants are categorically targeted at specific groups of children, especially different categories of orphans.

There is limited literature on the fast-growing field of the politics of social protection in Namibia. Authors have investigated the politics of proposals for a Basic Income Grant (BIG), arguing that Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) were consequential in the piloting of BIG but failed to successfully advocate for its expansion as the government could not afford it (Osterkamp, 2013; Haarmann, 2009; Haarmann & Haarmann, 2007). The push for the BIG shows the importance of individuals within Civil Society Organisations, especially Bishop Zephania Kameeta, then chair of the BIG coalition, but the failure to convince political elites to support the adoption of BIG reflects their limitations.

Literature on child welfare grants in Namibia argues that colonial history was important in the adoption of CWGs after South African rule in 1994 (Ulriksen, 2013:45; Levine et al., 2011:39). Namibia, like most countries in Southern Africa, started off using familial and residual CWRs, with public provision focused on orphans or children living in poor, single-mother households. Namibia was slow to follow South Africa's lead in introducing a Child Support Grant to provide general support to poor families with children. There is, however, limited interrogation of why there were limited reforms in Namibia in comparison with South Africa, yet the two countries inherited similar grants at independence. While emphasising the importance of inheritance, the role of international pressure is underestimated in literature. It is not clear, from the existing literature, why CWGs were orphan-targeted for a prolonged period of time (between 1990 and 2013) and what factors were important in the transition to poverty-targeting.

This article builds on this literature to investigate why Namibia, a variant of South Africa, did not follow South Africa's lead in introducing a CSG, only expanding pro-poor provision later and more slowly. The findings advance the importance of inheritance (colonial history explains adoption of South Africa-like CWGs) but further argue that individuals within government, weak Civil Society Organisations, and lack of electoral competition, account for limited reforms that have promoted primarily targeting of broken families, modest coverage and relatively ungenerous grants. Some individuals, Kameeta in particular, might have been important in pushing for the BIG but played a limited role in the reforms of the mixed CWR. The lack of reforms from independence up to 2012 strongly reflect the influence of Angula who was very powerful in cabinet and could have influenced other political elites to reject proposals for expansion of CWGs. Angula's departure from the powerful office of Prime Minister was followed by the appointment of Geingob. The major reforms of CWGs happened

during Geingob's time as Prime Minister up to his presidency in 2015. It is likely that Pohamba anointed Geingob as his successor because they were both reformists. It is further argued that the recent reforms - provision of general support to poor families with children - reflect the role of international pressure, particularly individuals in United Nations agencies (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF]) and international organisations (the International Labour Organisation, ILO), but this role was constrained by party politics (the dominant one-party system and ambivalence to cash transfers by influential individuals [political elites] within government).

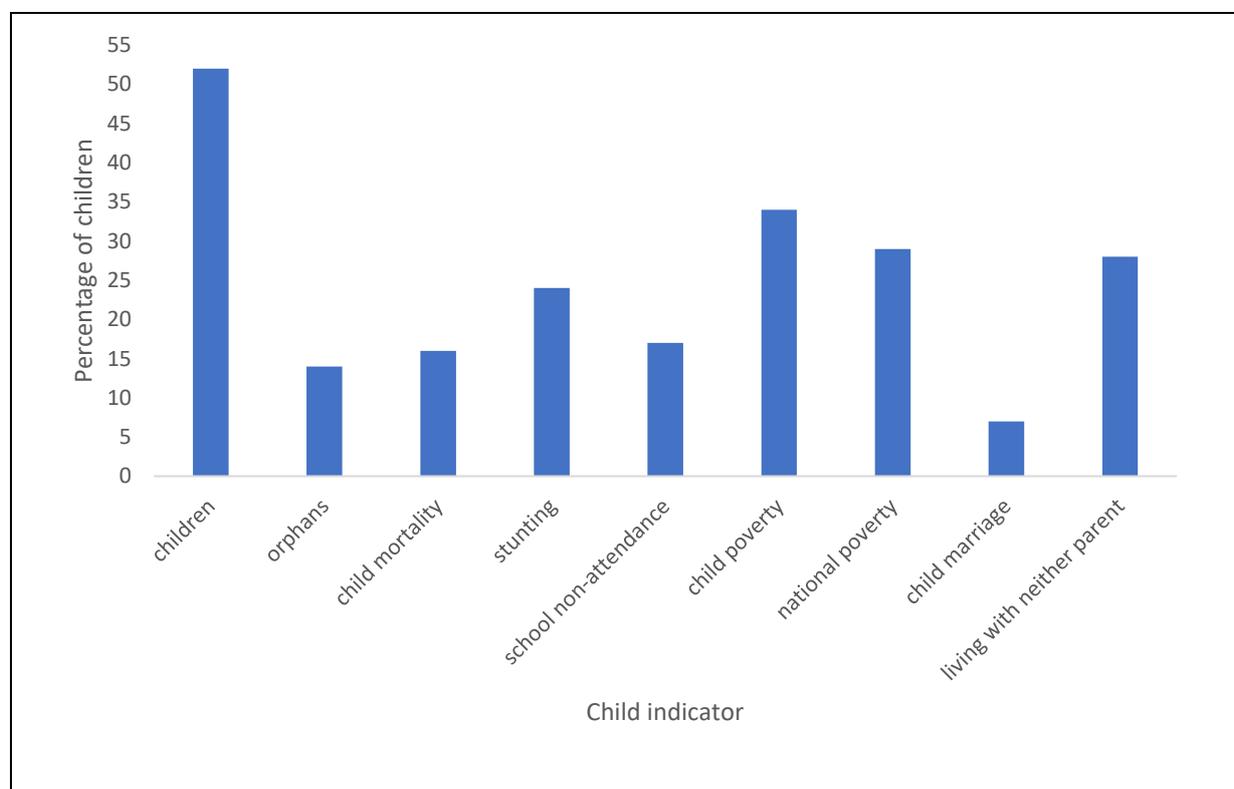
Namibia's CWR transformed from familial to a distinctively mixed (familial-pro-poor) regime. Except for the Special Maintenance Grant (SMG) whose eligibility is based on medical assessments, other child grants directly target low-income households, supposedly the poor, because they are means-tested. The Vulnerable Grant (VG) directly targets low-income households with children but with both living parents. The Child Maintenance Grant (CMG) is pro-poor as it targets households that are likely to be poor due to death or incarceration of one spouse who was either an Old Age Pension (OAP) or disability grant beneficiary. The CMG is also familial by targeting households with one absent parent (who is likely to be the male breadwinner). But the CMG also covers many non-poor children since the means test threshold is linked to the applicant caregiver yet 'other household members may have other (better) sources of income' (ILO, 2014:115). The Foster Care Grant (FCG) largely targets on the basis of perceived family breakdown. FCGs are limited to double orphans. The FCG, however, 'has an in-built poverty-targeting element' as it targets households that are likely to be poorer due to over-representation of orphans and the number of children in such households (ILO, 2014:116).

Many of the features of the CWR in Namibia reflect the South African influence which is not surprising given that the CWGs were built on apartheid-era foundations. But there have been significant reforms since independence which has shifted the CWR in a mixed regime direction different to the pro-poor CWR in South Africa. The post South African rule eligibility criteria for the CMG and FCG directly limit access to 'broken' families and indirectly target poor households while the Vulnerable Grant is designed to directly benefit poor families with children to support a mixed CWR that is distinct from CWRs in South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe. This article investigates why Namibia, a variant of South Africa, did not follow South Africa's lead in introducing a CSG, and only expanded pro-poor provision later and more slowly.

Namibia is an upper middle-income country that has enjoyed political stability since independence from South Africa in 1990. The country has experienced a sustained period of strong growth, with an average annual rate of 6% per annum between 2010 and 2014 (World Bank, 2016) and a generally moderate economic

growth of about 4% per year since independence. Nevertheless, Namibia still experiences many developmental challenges. Unemployment rate was 28% in 2014, down, slightly, from 30% in 2013 (Namibia Statistics Agency [NSA], 2015a:68). The country remains one of the most unequal countries in the world. The Gini coefficient was 0.57 in 2015/6 decreasing from 0.70 in 1993/4 (NSA, 2016a:12). Vision 2030, the country's national development framework, acknowledges the inequality and envisions a Namibia where 'Poverty is reduced to the minimum, the existing pattern of income-distribution is equitable and disparity is at the minimum' (National Planning Commission [NPC], 2004: 104). Relative strong economic growth in Namibia has not been sufficient to deal with poverty, inequality, and unemployment (World Bank, 2016). Child poverty, the proportion of children living in a poor household, is relatively high and has remained considerably above the general poverty rate. As shown in Figure 1, in 2009/10 more than half (52%) of the poor were children and 34% of children lived in poverty. National poverty was at 29%. About 17% of children aged 6 to 18 years never attended school (NSA, 2012b). In 2013, 14% of all children were orphans, 28% lived with neither parent, child mortality (deaths per 1,000 children surviving to their first birthday) was 16% and 24% were stunted. The national HIV prevalence was 17% (Ministry of Health and Social Services (MoHSS) & ICF International, 2014).

*Figure 1: Child poverty in Namibia*



Source: Namibia Statistics Agency (2014a; 2012a); MoHSS (2003)

Since the 1990s, ‘Namibia became one of the few countries in Africa that has a well-established and long-functioning social grant system, though the quantity of such grants is still relatively low’ (NSA, 2012a:16). Income support for families with children is extended directly and indirectly through a set of social cash transfer programmes. Children directly benefit, as discussed, from four Child Welfare Grants (CWGs) - Vulnerable Grant, CMG, FCG and the SMG. In addition, all children in public primary (since 2013) and secondary (since 2016) schools access free education and, since 1991, almost all children in primary school benefit from the Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP).

Children also benefit indirectly from social pensions – Old Age Pension (OAP), Disability Pension (DP) and War Veterans’ Subvention (WVS) - paid to the elderly (60 years and above), disabled (above 16 years) and war veterans respectively. The social pensions, though received by adults like grandparents, strengthen the mixed CWR since they provide income support for broken and poor families with children. Grandparents contribute enormously to the safety net in Namibia by letting the entire family share their social pension in times of need (Subbarao, 1998). Child care by grandparents, particularly grandmothers, is a common phenomenon in African countries and more prevalent in Namibia. Grandmothers end up being the orphan caregivers as their own children die and maternal and paternal or double orphans are likely to end up in their hands when their parents die. UNICEF (2007:30) reported that grandparents ‘care for around 40% of all orphans in the United Republic of Tanzania, 45% in Uganda, more than 50% in Kenya and about 60% in Namibia and Zimbabwe’. Although there is lack of beneficiary data, children with poor but able-bodied parents benefit from their parents’ participation in food- or cash-for-works programmes that ‘are usually implemented in times of covariant shocks like drought or floods’ (Chiripanhura & Niño-Zarazúa, 2013:27). Approximately 21% of all children indirectly benefitted from social pensions in 2013 (ILO, 2014). In as much as coverage of the direct child benefits is low compared to neighbouring middle-income countries, South Africa and Botswana, these indirect benefits expanded, albeit modestly, coverage of the CWGs. The next section discusses the distinctive characteristics (coverage and targeting) of Namibia’s child welfare regime. An examination of the evolution of social grants will follow and suggested explanations to the reforms of the mixed CWR will be discussed in the next section before drawing conclusions. Elsewhere, I examine more fully how and why Namibia’s mixed CWR is different from South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe.

## 2. Distinctive characteristics of Namibia's child welfare regime

The reach of child welfare grants is distinctively low in Namibia in comparison with other middle-income countries such as South Africa and Botswana. Namibia is also distinguished by relatively ungenerous social cash transfers. The literature identifies the CWR type in Namibia as orphan-targeted but this investigation shows that, despite Namibia being a variant of the South African social grant system, pro-poor grants were introduced recently to create a mixed CWR.

### 2.1. Coverage

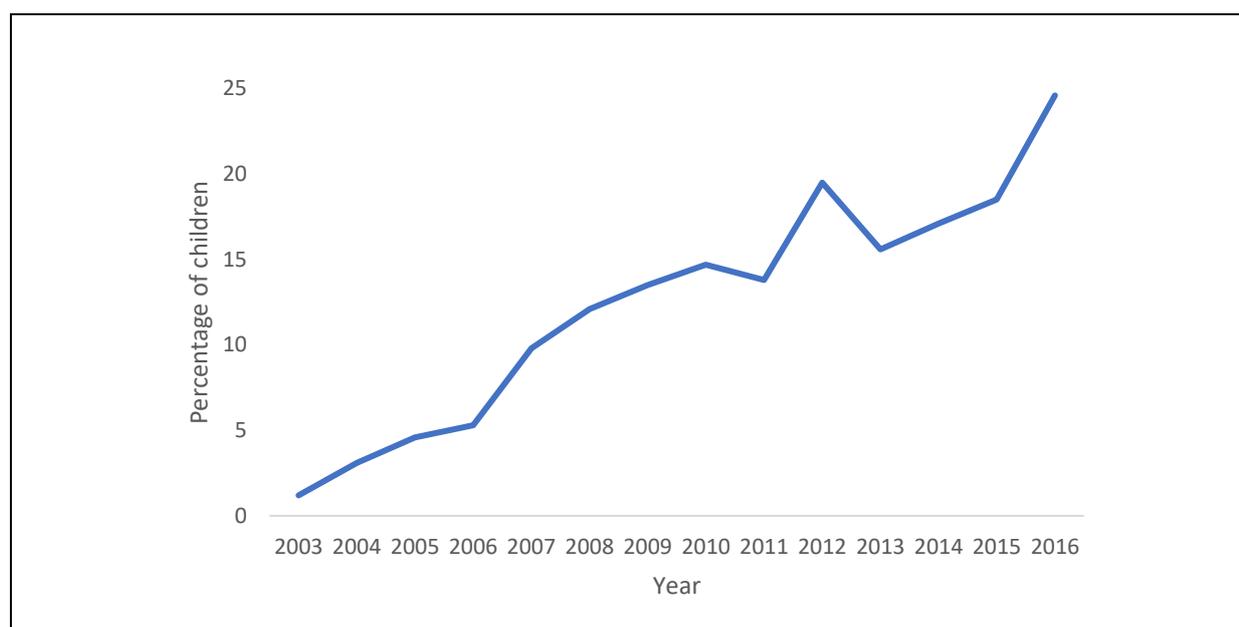
Namibia's CWR is distinguished by low coverage. Coverage for the CWR includes two dimensions of child benefits: direct child grants and programmes and indirect social cash transfers a family receives. In 2009/10, 35% of all children directly and indirectly benefited from social grants (CMG, FCG, SMG, DG, OAP and War veterans' grants but excluding the HGSFP and fee waivers) (NSA, 2012a:17). The number of children directly benefiting from child grants is relatively low but has been gradually increasing. Figure 2 shows that all child grants covered about 25% of all children in 2016, increasing from 20% in 2012. This excluded children of primary school going age in selected schools (in poor communities) benefitting from the HGSFP that benefitted 330,000 children (35% of all children) in more than 1400 schools.<sup>1</sup> All children in public pre-primary, primary and secondary schools received free education: 641,878 benefiting children, (67% of all children).

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[http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ep/wfp273493.pdf?\\_ga=1.199491566.1599468141.1475086145](http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ep/wfp273493.pdf?_ga=1.199491566.1599468141.1475086145). Accessed 6 July 2015.

Figure 2: Direct reach of all child grants, 2003-2016



Source: Statistics obtained from the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare

Children benefit indirectly from other social protection programmes. Given that 70% of all households in Namibia have at least one child (ILO, 2014:41; NSA, 2012c), it can be estimated that all recipients of social pensions and Veterans’ subvention share their benefits with at least one child. Table 1 shows the proportion of children who likely benefited from social pensions in 2013. A total of 21% of all children benefited indirectly. The OAP contributed 15% while the disability and veterans’ subvention contributed about 3% each.

Table 1: Proportion of children indirectly reached by other programmes, 2013

Programme	Recipients	Proportion of children %
Old Age Pension	143,007	14.9
Disability Pension	27,312	2.9
War Veterans’ subvention	24,682	2.6
Food/cash for work*	-	-

Source: ILO, 2014. \* no statistics available for food for work programmes

Namibia is one of a few countries in Southern Africa with legislated social provision. According to the International Labour Organisation, child and family benefits programmes anchored in national legislation ‘usually are more stable in terms of funding and institutional frameworks, guarantee coverage as a matter of

right, and provide legal entitlements to eligible individuals and households' (ILO, 2015:16). Article 95 of the constitution of Namibia promotes the 'Welfare of the People' through ensuring the 'enactment of legislation to ensure that the unemployed, the incapacitated, the indigent and the disadvantaged are accorded such social benefits and amenities as are determined by Parliament to be just and affordable with due regard to the resources of the State' (Article 95(g)) (GRN, 1998). Sections 240-252 of the Children's Act (2015) provide for the payment of state grants to children caregivers (GRN, 2015a).

Namibia's CWR benefits are very low both relative to the poverty lines and GDP per capita at US\$4,947 in 2015 (World Bank, 2016). Namibia, like South Africa, uses three poverty lines: the Food Poverty Line (FPL); the Lower Bound Poverty Line (LBPL); and the Upper Bound Poverty Line (UBPL). In December 2017, the FPL was US\$18, the LBPL was US\$25 and US\$33 for the UBPL (using the 2012 prices adjusted for purchasing power parity, PPP). The poverty lines, unlike in South Africa, are set at quite a low level to reflect the residual design of Namibia's CWR. Most poor children are likely to live in households that receive a child grant (N\$250 or US\$16) and either a monthly universal Old Age Pension or Disability Pension (N\$1,100 or US\$69). In December 2017, a five-person average household received a combined transfer of US\$85, translating to US\$17/person/month (or US\$0.55/person/day) which is very ungenerous relative to all the three national poverty lines and the international poverty line of US\$1.90/person/day.

Cash benefits for child-specific grants are the lowest compared to other neighbouring middle-income countries, specifically Botswana and South Africa. The modest cash benefits of the CWGs are, in part, a result of the supposedly indirect benefits children receive from the country's broader social protection system. Most needy children are cared for by the elderly, and the political elites within South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), believe that an increase and expansion of benefits for the elderly (which are universal) will have a 'trickle-down effect' on children in such households.

## 2.2. Targeting ‘broken’ families

Notwithstanding that Namibia has four child-specific grants supposedly for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs), up to 2014 the grants largely targeted ‘broken’ families - one or no parent families due to death caused by war or AIDS or absent fathers (unknown or incarcerated) - rather than poverty-targeted. Broken families had either single orphans (maternal or paternal), double orphans (lost both parents) or ‘social’ orphans (children with absent parents or the parents’ status is unknown). Orphans increased from about 7% in 2000 to approximately 10% of all children in 2013 but the number of children living with either parent was high at about 61% in 2013, decreasing from 64% in 2000 (see Table 2).

*Table 2: Distribution of orphans by parent status, 2000-2013*

<b>Parent survival status</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2013</b>
Both M[other] and F[ather] alive and present	26.4	24.8
M present, F deceased	3.9	4.6
M present, F alive but absent	29.3	27.8
M deceased, F deceased	1.1	1.9
M deceased, F alive but absent	2	2.7
M deceased, F present	0.4	0.5
M alive but absent, F deceased	3.7	3.7
M alive but absent, F alive but absent	26.4	28.3
M alive but absent, F present	3.6	3.7
Orphans as % all children	7.6	9.7

*Source: NSA (2003:12) & NSA (2014a:22).*

Children’s living arrangements were consequential in the design of the child grants that focused on ‘broken’ families in Namibia. The eligibility criteria prioritised orphans defined as ‘a child aged 0-17 years whose maternal mother or paternal father or both are dead’ (NSA, 2015b:22; GRN, 2004) to exclude equally or more needy poor, non-orphaned vulnerable children. A vulnerable child in Namibia refers to a child with a high probability of experiencing a welfare loss above a socially accepted norm, and as well as a lack of appropriate risk management instruments in place which may result in risky/uncertain events on the part of the child (NSA, 2015b:22). This contrasts with the international definition that defines a vulnerable child as:

a child below the age of 18 and: (i) has lost one or both parents, or (ii) has a chronically ill parent (regardless of whether the parent lives in the same household as the child), or (iii) lives in a household

where in the past 12 months at least one adult died and was sick for 3 of the 12 months before he/she died, or (iv) lives in a household where at least one adult was seriously ill for at least 3 months in the past 12 months (UNICEF, UNAIDS, USAID, 2002).

Up to 2013, OVCs in Namibia meant orphans. Therefore, the CWR was primarily familial from independence until 2013.

Without general support for poor households with children, the system of child grants was inequitable as well as badly targeted and did little to ensure the future of Namibia's vulnerable children and the country's growth prospects (ILO, 2014). Research in Southern Africa has shown that household poverty rather than orphanhood is a more important negative determinant of child well-being (Campbell et al., 2008). Despite the evidence that not all households with orphans were vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity (MGECW & World Food Programme [WFP], 2007), there was a marginal difference in incidence, depth and severity of poverty between orphaned and non-orphaned children and that a high number (82%) of poor children were non-orphans (MGECW, 2010:151), the eligibility criteria for the main child grants – CMG and FCG – were 'strongly focused on the orphan status (single or double orphans) of the beneficiaries' (MGECW, 2010:150). Orphan statistics in Namibia show that orphanhood was a major problem as in other countries in the region. However, orphanhood was less important than 'broken' families in determining child grants targeting.

Concerns about children in 'broken' families rather than orphans per se (as in Botswana) were important in cabinet's decision to focus more on orphans than other groups of vulnerable children. France Kaudinge, SWAPO Director of Administration, pointed out that SWAPO leaders, including Nahas Angula, Prime Minister (2005-2012) and Minister of Defence (2012-2015) and Nangolo Mbumba particularly as Personal Secretary to SWAPO President Sam Nujoma (1990-1993) and Finance Minister (1996-2003), believed in poverty reduction through employment creation hence viewed extending government support to children with both surviving parents as assuming the parents' responsibility.<sup>2</sup> In principle, the CMG was designed to benefit poor children irrespective of status of their parents. In practice, the CMG is for single orphans with one parent for whatever reason, such as those with a parent absent, dead or incarcerated for more than six months. Angula said at independence the government was more worried about 'children of war' (children who lost their parents during the colonial period)

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<sup>2</sup> Separate interviews with France Kaudinge, SWAPO Director of Administration, 21 July 2015, and Nahas Angula.

and that led to the narrow focus on single and double orphans whose caregivers received CMGs or FCGs.<sup>3</sup>

The adoption of a Vulnerable Grant in 2014 shifted targeting from orphan to poverty-targeting but it was not a radical change as the old grants continued to target orphans. Overall, child provision assumed a mixed (familial-pro-poor) CWR with the introduction of a poverty-targeted grant. The shift, as discussed later, reflected international influence combined with domestic politics (party politics within the ruling SWAPO party).

### **3. The evolution of Namibia's child welfare regime: changes and choices, 1990-2017**

From independence in 1990 to 2017, the CWR in Namibia went through three key moments of change and choice. Under President Sam Nujoma (1990-2005), the SWAPO-led government inherited CWGs introduced during the colonial period when Namibia was under South African rule. Before independence, the grants were paid to poor single mothers but the grant amounts depended on race. At independence, President Nujoma's government equalised the grant amounts across all races as well as targeting 'broken' families to assume a familial trajectory. The second phase is between 2005 and 2014 under President Hifikepunye Pohamba. Familialism persisted in the first part of Pohamba's administration but later shifted to include poverty targeting to form a mixed CWR. The last phase is since 2014 under President Hage Geingob who has not presided over major reforms except for the adoption of free secondary education which was already at an advanced stage of implementation when he came to power. Hage, therefore, has maintained the mixed CWR.

#### **3.1. Social grants reforms under President Sam Nujoma, 1990-2005**

The SWAPO-led government, like ANC in post-apartheid South Africa, inherited CWGs introduced before independence (Namibia was subsumed under South African rule between 1915 and 1990). The new Sam Nujoma administration did not abolish the grants like the ANC in 1994 but expanded them to primarily cover a small category of 'broken' families that was barely above 1% by 2003. The lack

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Nahas Angula, former Prime Minister, 9 July 2015, Safari Hotel, Windhoek.

of general support to poor families with children and limited CWGs access to 'broken' families supported a familial CWR (later changed to mixed regime). In contrast, South Africa moved in a different direction at independence. When the ANC came to power in 1994 it inherited similar grants but progressively expanded them to most poor children to adopt a pro-poor CWR. Namibia, therefore, inherited the same apartheid social protection system of social grants with South Africa at independence. Nevertheless, child grants in South Africa have remarkably reformed in terms of targeting poor children, the number of beneficiaries, and generosity, whilst in Namibia they comparatively remained modest, limited to 'broken families', and ungenerous.

The variation between Namibia and South Africa after democracy is, in part, due to differences in the political dynamics each of the new governments had to redress. The ANC-led government in South Africa had to deracialise the grants that primarily benefited the white population. In contrast, in colonial Namibia (under South African rule), grants were also targeted at lone poor mothers but for all races. However, the value of grants also depended on race. Thus, the SWAPO-led government had to redress variation in benefits while the ANC-led government had to make reforms that would achieve racial parity.

At independence in 1990, President Nujoma's administration equalized the amount of CWGs for all children regardless of their race, and fairly expanded support for families with children, particularly orphans and not the broader group of vulnerable children. Before independence, few children benefitted from the CMG if they were poor or received FCGs if they were double orphans, because the grants were urban biased yet a large proportion of these children resided in the rural areas. Yet the grants were distributed on racial grounds similar to apartheid South Africa hence the amount varied by race: N\$382 (US\$24) for whites, N\$135 (US\$9) for coloureds and N\$55 (US\$3) for blacks. The amounts also applied to other grants including the Old Age Pension (OAP) and Disability Pension (DP). In 1990, Namibia inherited a dual economy characterized by interrelated challenges of low economic growth, a high rate of poverty, inequitable distribution of wealth and income, and high unemployment (ILO, 2014). So households, especially those with children, suffered from exceptionally high income inequalities and poverty levels compared to other medium human development countries, and interventions were needed to reduce inequality, extreme poverty and vulnerability (NPC, 2012; GRN & UNICEF, 2013). Equalizing child grants clearly became a central component of the national response.

Albert Biwa, Acting Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare (MoPESW), said when Namibia got independence from South Africa in 1990, all the grants – child and other grants – were equalized to N\$135 (US\$9), an amount previously set for coloureds and not the highest

amount that was received by whites because it was not affordable as more beneficiaries were enrolled.<sup>4</sup>

CWGs amounts increased sporadically if at all. Since independence, the amount of all child grants changed three times only, from N\$135 (US\$9) in 1990 to N\$200 (US\$13) in 2000 and N\$250 (US\$16) in 2013. As a result, the real value of grants declined due to inflation and children could not maintain their standard of living and fell back into poverty in-between the increments. The consequence of not raising the value of child grants in line with inflation (as was the case with the OAP) is that the real value of the CMG and FCG has eroded by 39% between 1996 and 2009 and by 23% between 1999 and 2009 (Levine et al., 2009). The increments for the universal OAP and the DG were comparably equal to child grants up to 2000 but thereafter increased bi-annually to reach N\$1000 (US\$63) by 2015. The regular increase for the OAP were perhaps because most elderly people care for children, especially orphans who lost their parents during the war or to HIV/AIDS.<sup>5</sup>

The limited reforms of the value of child benefits could be explained by low electoral competition and partial change of government. Since independence, the war of liberation party, SWAPO, has been in power to keep a same one-party rule. Unlike in Zimbabwe where Robert Mugabe was president from 1980 to 2017, three SWAPO presidents have changed power since independence: Sam Nujoma (1990-2005), Hifikepunye Pohamba (2005-2015) and Hage Geingob (since 2015). SWAPO has been winning all the presidential and parliamentary elections emphatically with the largest percentage poll in 2015 when Geingob polled 87% of the vote. Sam Nujoma was declared president without elections in 1990, and won with about 76% in 1994 and about 77% in 1999. Pohamba won with about 76% in 2004 and in 2009. Unlike in Zimbabwe where electoral competition between ZANU PF and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) formations led to substantial social policy reforms between 2009 and 2013 (Chinyoka & Seekings, 2016), or in Zambia when the Patriotic Front led by Michael Sata took over from the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) from 2011 (Siachiwena, 2016), SWAPO has been under no pressure from the political opposition to reform welfare policies.

When Pohamba came to power, child grants were N\$200 (US\$13) and they almost remained so throughout his presidency. They only changed to N\$250 (US\$16) in 2013, just before the 2014 elections and his exit in March 2015. Ivin Lombardt, Executive Director of Namibia Non-Governmental Organizations

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Albert Biwa, Windhoek, 21 July 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Albert Biwa.

Forum (NANGOF) said while Pohamba was hailed for pushing for increased spending on education and housing, he seemed ambivalent about social spending on child social protection. Lombardt noted that Pohamba, like his predecessor Sam Nujoma, did not favour cash transfers.<sup>6</sup> Surprisingly it was during his tenure, almost at the end of his second term in office between 2010 and 2014, when discussions about the universal child grant started and his government was at the point of adopting the grant when elections were held in 2014 and the negotiations between cabinet and MGECW, supported by UNICEF, had to be revamped with the new government, which is still reviewing the proposals.

The stagnation of grants amounts was also partly due to the prioritization of expanding the grants coverage over amounts. When the grants were split into different ministries in 2002, that is, child welfare grants placed under the MGECW (then Ministry of Women Affairs) and Old Age Pensions and Disability Pension in the Ministry of Labour and Social Services, bureaucrats in MGECW debated on whether to bid for increasing the number of beneficiaries or benefits and settled for enrolling more beneficiaries. Albert Biwa, then Grants Coordinator in the Ministry of Health and Child Care, said, ‘The ministry [MGECW] did not really push for increasing the benefits. The major drive was in registering beneficiaries rather than increasing the amount of the grants since there were few children [9600] benefiting when they took over.’<sup>7</sup> Helena Andjamba, Director: Child Welfare Services in MGECW concurred:

Our major concern as a ministry was not to increase the amount of benefits for those already receiving the grants. There were many children who needed the grants but were excluded. We did not fight for money to increase the amount so much although it was part of our proposal. We fought for money to increase the number of children benefiting and not the amount. We knew we could not get both. So, we put the amount issue aside for the meantime.<sup>8</sup>

The near absence of review of the amount was thus the result of a conscious choice to expand coverage over generosity although there were concerns over affordability. Biwa indicated that, ‘From the finance side it was the lack of fiscal space to increase the grants. We had to increase but also keep the bill manageable not to fall in the same trap as what happened in Greece (expanded benefits but now could not sustain the bill).’<sup>9</sup> Affordability was more of a political than a fiscal

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Ivin Lombardt, 24 July 2015, Windhoek.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Albert Biwa.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Helena Andjamba, 15 July 2015, Windhoek.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Albert Biwa.

one. More often than not, political elites shift their definition of affordability to suit their political ends (Seekings, 2017). Slater (2011:257) concurs, 'Affordability is not only about cost but also about political choice.' On the other hand, since independence it became SWAPO policy to increase grants that they deemed more important in reducing poverty especially the OAP. The SWAPO government was more supportive of the OAP and made a decision not to increase both child grants and the OAP at the same time. As a result, the government have tried to keep the OAP to at least US\$2/day and have made consistent inflationary adjustments. The OAP increased from N\$135 (US\$9) in 1990, N\$1000 (US\$63) by 2015<sup>10</sup> and N\$1,100 (US\$69) in 2016.

Ideological underpinnings within SWAPO were important in policy decisions to increase social pensions rather than child grants. Although child grants in Namibia target OVCs, in practice they were for orphans and provided to 'single caregivers' (surviving spouses, a single parent looking after children when the husband is serving a jail term or a father (not mother) receiving an OAP). The general belief in Cabinet seems to have been that the elderly were more responsible than the 'single parents' hence government favoured increasing the OAP than child grants. Biwa stated that the 'grandmothers are the mothers' so government prioritized them knowing they will share the benefits with their grandchildren.<sup>11</sup>

Also, the amount of child grants was maintained at N\$200 (US\$13) for more than a decade - 2000 to 2012 – as the SWAPO cabinet decided in 2002 to increase all the other grants (OAP, DG and Veterans grants) except for child grants on the perception that caregivers were abusing child grants. Nahas Angula, who was influential in the decision, was against cash transfers as he believed caregivers receiving 'child grants were either abusing grants through converting them for their own use or had too much cash from child and their own grants'. Angula started pushing Cabinet to 'be cautious' with giving cash transfers during his time as Minister of Higher Education from 1995 to 2005, supposed that cash encouraged dependency and believed government should only give cash to the most vulnerable people such as orphans and the elderly. Prime Minister Angula successfully convinced cabinet to limit cash transfers to needy families by only adjusting grants for the elderly.<sup>12</sup> The result was an increase of Old Age Pension, Disability Pension and Veterans grants from N\$200 (US\$13) in 2000 to N\$550 (US\$35) in 2012, while child grants remained at N\$200 (US\$13). Angula

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Helena Andjamba.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Albert Biwa.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Gerson Uaripi Tjihenuna, former Under Secretary: Policy Analysis & Coordination in Cabinet, 14 July 2015, Khomasdal, Windhoek.

himself, who supported self-help income generating projects or public works said,

the government was giving too much cash for nothing. It was not necessary to increase child grants and pensions [OAP, DG and Veterans grants] because they end up in the same household. That is why those looking for the children will abuse the grants, they buy alcohol or use the money on themselves because they will have a lot of cash'.<sup>13</sup>

It is true that the grants may end up in the same household but only 18% of all children and 22% of poor children were in households where there is a person receiving a pension (NSA, 2012a:16). Also, there is no corroborative evidence to suggest that recipients abused grants. Iben Nashandi also believed beneficiaries abuse cash transfers. Nashandi supported the parsimonious benefits noting that, 'children already have free basic education and will have free secondary education starting in 2016. They are benefiting from the school feeding programme and fee waivers at health facilities'. Research has shown that poor people do not spend cash transfers on 'temptation' goods such as beer, cigarettes and drugs. Evans and Popova (2016) use 19 studies from across the globe, Africa, Latin America and Asia included, to examine poor people cash transfer spending on 'temptation goods' (cigarettes and alcohol) and conclude that consumption of 'temptation goods' actual reduces after cash transfers. Evans and Popova argue that the reduction is because conditional cash transfers are earmarked for health and education, for example, and unconditional cash transfers motivate recipients to redirect cash they would use on alcohol to other things.

In 1991 the Nujoma administration adopted a Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) in pre-primary and primary schools. The HGSFP was introduced by the World Food Programme (WFP) in collaboration with the Ministry of Education in 1991 and the government took over in 1996 (ILO, 2014:98; Ministry of Education [MoE], 2012). The HGSFP increased the coverage of child social transfers, increasing to 330,000 children in 2016<sup>14</sup> from 91,177 children in 1997 (Subbarao, 1998). The nutritional programme serves a mid-morning meal and supported 35% of all children (330,000 children) in 2016. The HGSFP was initially designed to benefit OVCs in schools in poor communities. In practice, it is extended to all children wishing to partake the food in beneficiary schools. The focus on OVCs shows SWAPO's ideological preferences to provide social protection to the indigent. The support for a minimalist welfare state within SWAPO was also demonstrated when the Nujoma

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Nahas Angula.

<sup>14</sup>[http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ep/wfp273493.pdf?\\_ga=1.199491566.1599468141.1475086145](http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ep/wfp273493.pdf?_ga=1.199491566.1599468141.1475086145). Accessed 10 June 2015.

government reintroduced School Development Funds (SDFs) in 2001. Thus, while South Africa's CWR transformed to a pro-poor regime through the CSG in the late 1990s, the CWR in Namibia took a familial trajectory at independence and remained so during Nujoma's presidency.

### **3.2. Social grants reforms under President Hifikepunye Pohamba, 2005-2014**

Reforms during the second phase, 2005 to 2014, under president Pohamba, fall into two parts. The first part is between 2005 to 2011 almost corresponding to Pohamba's first term of presidency. Initially, Pohamba, like Nujoma after grants equalisation, did not institute any significant reforms but maintained a familial CWR that continued to be minimalist by targeting a small category of 'broken' families. Pohamba seemed not different from Nujoma, i.e., conservative (familial) and continuing with School Development Funds (SDFs). During this part, SWAPO continued to face a weak opposition, passive Civil Society Organisations and limited international pressure. Pohamba was reelected in 2009 with a landslide victory of about 77% of the vote (like in his first election in 2004), without literally implementing any child grants reforms. He could have drawn his political support from SWAPO's general support as a liberation movement that liberated Namibia from South African rule.

The second part of this phase is between 2012 to 2015, a period of substantial reforms that entailed the introduction of new grants and, most importantly, the shift from primarily family targeting to a mix with poverty targeting to create a mixed CWR. The one party (SWAPO) dominance persisted so the pressure to reform did not come from competitive elections like in Botswana and Zimbabwe, or from organised Civil Society Organisations like in South Africa, but from both internal lobbying (from within government and SWAPO) and external lobbying (from international organizations and agencies especially UNICEF), supported by the ILO.

During this second part, political elites formed two categories. The first group comprised influential leaders who were ambivalent about cash transfers but supported minimal state provision. They did not abolish the grants, but continued the grants without major reforms. Cabinet members, including Angula, Mbumba and the president Pohamba, constitute this group. Nujoma, as former president, was said to continue to be very influential in policy-making even in his retirement.<sup>15</sup> The second category consisted of less influential advocates of

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with France Kaudinge.

reform. This group included the minister responsible for child grants and bureaucrats within this ministry, especially the two directors and the permanent secretary. This group believed in the expansion of CWGs to fulfill the rights of women and children in line with the ministry's mandate yet were cautious in their approach to convince cabinet to endorse their proposals. This category was fully aware of the first group of politicians who were likely to resist their proposals, hence they preferred proposing one reform at a time. During the second part of Pohamba's presidency, Sioka and team collaborated with UNICEF at a time when SWAPO was seeking reelection in 2014. These political dynamics led SWAPO to embrace the civil society and international organisations to introduce the SMG, adopt free education, review grants amounts, and adopt the poverty-targeted Vulnerable Grant and legislate CWGs. The result was a mixed CWR born out of the continued family-focused and poverty-targeted grants.

During Pohamba's first term as president, bureaucrats continued to be cautious with proposing 'outrageous' reforms.<sup>16</sup> Bureaucrats and the minister responsible for CWGs, Sioka, realised the need to increase the grants amounts and expand coverage to other poor children and excluded orphans as reported by WFP-funded outreach (registration) exercise conducted in 2006/7. Sioka was not convinced that Pohamba would warm to her proposals. Instead, the ministry focused 'on registering more orphans, at least to enrol more children than increase the money for a few children'.<sup>17</sup>

The first part of Pohamba's presidency was characterised by failed reforms as his government rejected UNICEF proposals to abolish primary SDFs. In 2007 UNICEF had proposed the abolition SDFs to improve access and enrolment as part of 'mitigating the multiple impacts of HIV and AIDS on children's right to education' (UNICEF, 2007:3). The proposal, drafted by Khin-Sandi Lwin, a UNICEF representative who had worked in the country for seven years, noted SDF as 'a major barrier for access and retention for both primary and secondary school' (UNICEF, 2007:1). Cabinet turned down the proposal on the basis of affordability and the perceived responsibility of the family to provide for children. Although Nangolo Mbumba, Minister of Education (2005-2010), who supported work-based programmes to support poor families, made the submissions to Cabinet, he was himself against free education. Mbumba was one among Cabinet members who believed that parents should contribute to their children's education,<sup>18</sup> suggesting that political elites within SWAPO supported a minimalist welfare state. The rejections saw the continued exclusion of poor

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Helena Andjamba.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Helena Andjamba.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with G.U Tjihenuna.

children and sustained familialism that resonated with political elites within SWAPO.

The second part of Pohamba's presidency (2012-2015) is characterised by significant reforms that transformed the CWR from familial to mixed. In May 2012 the Pohamba administration adopted Special Maintenance Grants (SMG) paid to caregivers of children under 16 years who are diagnosed as temporarily or permanently disabled including children with HIV/AIDS and or blind (Levine et al., 2011:44). The grant provided income relief for caregivers of disabled children who barely had time to leave them and engage in economic activities such as looking for employment or petty buying and selling, activities that require them to be away from home and the disabled child(ren). In many cases, the caregivers had other children to provide for, yet they had very limited income support.<sup>19</sup> The government intervened to reduce this burden of care.

Moreover, the increasing number of households headed by disabled children was becoming worrisome, at 306 in 2011 from 205 in 2001 and 10 in 1991 (NSA, 2016b:51). While Namibia, like South Africa, had an adult disability pension for 'people with temporary or permanent disability, including the blind' to support 'disability prevention and rehabilitation' (Chiripanhura & Niño-Zarazúa, 2013:18), there was no similar support for children living with disabilities. Civil society, particularly the National Federation of People with Disabilities in Namibia (NFPDN), proposed a grant for children with disabilities which government approved.<sup>20</sup> Pohamba's openness to civil society shown by his embracing of the NFPDN marked the beginning of his willingness to work with Civil Society Organisations and other agencies. As shown later, the reforms that changed the CWR from familial to mixed entailed close engagement between these agencies and Pohamba's government. The SMG's parsimonious benefits, like all the other child grants, amounted to N\$250 per month per child in 2016 up from N\$200 (US\$13) in 2012. In Namibia, only a third of people living with disabilities receive disability pension (NSA, 2016b:7). The SMG benefitted 4972 children in 2015 from 4018 in 2012.

After adopting the SMG, Pohamba continued to be a reformist who became sensitive to children's rights to education, leading his government to abolish SDFs to adopt free primary education in 2012/3 (MoE, 2011). Pohamba had continued with SDFs during his first term of presidency. A total of 458,933 children (48% of all children)<sup>21</sup> benefited from the new policy. The provision of

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Helena Andjamba.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Helena Andjamba.

<sup>21</sup> The Namibian, 09 January 2013, <http://www.namibian.com.na/103971/archive-read/No-school-fees-for-primaries-THE-Ministry-of> Accessed 02 July 2015.

free primary education fulfilled the constitutional provisions of free and compulsory primary education (Iipinga & Likando, 2013:137).

Three factors were significant in the cabinet decision to implement the free primary education policy. UNICEF had proposed the removal of SDF in 2007 to help achieve Millennium Development Goal i.e. achieve universal primary education two (UNICEF, 2007). The education minister then, Nangolo Mbumba, and Prime Minister Angula, both known advocates of poverty reduction through employment creation, were against free education hence the UNICEF proposal was rejected.<sup>22</sup> But the dedication of Abraham Iyambo, Minister of Education, Arts and Culture (2010-2013), to education reforms in Namibia was influential. As Minister of Education, Iyambo, who was also ‘a member of both the Central Committee and Political Bureau of SWAPO Party and the Chairperson of his Party ‘Think Tank’<sup>23</sup>, had urged the SWAPO cabinet to respect the constitution through adoption of free education. Iyambo’s personal interest in free education earned him the nickname ‘Doctor Book’ (one who loves education) by his Deputy Minister, David Namwandi.<sup>24</sup> Mourning his untimely death in February 2013, NANGOF’s chairperson, Henry Platt, remembered Iyambo as ‘one of our strongest and most dedicated allies in the pursuit of free and accessible quality education for all’ (*New Era*, 5 February 2013).<sup>25</sup> Because of his interest in free education, Iyambo supported the UNICEF proposal and presented it to cabinet.<sup>26</sup>

Although the government had rejected UNICEF proposals to abolish SDF in 2007, pressure to introduce free education from UN agencies was central in the cabinet decision in 2012. In 2011 the Ministry of Education (with Iyambo as minister), in partnership with UNICEF and UNESCO, commissioned two studies to analyze the gaps in quality and equity in education and document the context of free primary education in Namibia. The first study found that ‘the inequitable distribution of wealth and income mirrors inequalities in education with the poorest children the most disadvantaged’ (UNICEF, 2011:2). The second study concurred, but also concluded that SDF contributions by parents did not only

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with G.U. Tjihenua.

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[http://www.moe.gov.na/news\\_article.php?type=pressrelease&id=102&title=Ministry%20Mourns%20the%20Death%20of%20Dr.Iyambo](http://www.moe.gov.na/news_article.php?type=pressrelease&id=102&title=Ministry%20Mourns%20the%20Death%20of%20Dr.Iyambo) Accessed 17 July 2015.

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[http://www.moe.gov.na/news\\_article.php?type=pressrelease&id=102&title=Ministry%20Mourns%20the%20Death%20of%20Dr.Iyambo](http://www.moe.gov.na/news_article.php?type=pressrelease&id=102&title=Ministry%20Mourns%20the%20Death%20of%20Dr.Iyambo) Accessed 17 July 2015.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.namibia-botschaft.de/index.php/regierungs-mitteilungen/450-nation-mourns-dr-iyambo> Accessed 12 July 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Gerson Uaripi Tjihenua.

perpetuate educational inequalities but were inconsistent with the constitution, and hence recommended the removal of SDF (Ministry of Education, 2011:16). The Legal Assistance Centre, a Civil Society Organisation at the University of Namibia, had also argued that SDFs were unconstitutional and government should consider abolishing them (Hubbard, 2011). The findings became the talking points during discussions for free primary education at the National Education Conference in 2011. The conference recommended the introduction of free primary education to resolve the inequality. Based on the study findings and conference deliberations, cabinet was convinced that elimination of SDF was necessary and approved the recommendations in 2012 and Namibia had free primary education from January 2013. Benson Katjirijova, Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) Youth League Secretary-General and shadow Minister of Education, indicated that UNICEF was the force behind the adoption of free education.<sup>27</sup> The cabinet decision reflects both the role of individuals and UN agencies in social policy reforms. Finally, Elma Dienda, a Member of Parliament and Secretary General of the DTA political party, pointed out that SWAPO had already started preparing for the 2014 elections so these reforms, including the later introduction of the Vulnerable Grant in 2014, ‘were part of the campaign strategy.’<sup>28</sup>

SWAPO proved to be a programmatic party when the Pohamba administration surprisingly instituted the first upward review of child grants amounts in a decade in 2013. Child grants amounts were adjusted to N\$250 (US\$16) in 2013 from N\$200 (US\$13) in 2000, consequently increasing the value of the grant but below the absolute poverty line of N\$283.47 (US\$18). ‘The real value of the Child Maintenance Grant and Foster Care Grant has eroded by 39% between 1996 and 2009 and by 23% between 1999 and 2009’ (Levine et al., 2009:154). The MGECW, supported by UNICEF, had recommended the upward review of all child grants to N\$300 (US\$19) in 2010 following a UNICEF funded grants assessment study that revealed their ineffectiveness in poverty reduction (MGECW, 2010). The report noted that grants were last adjusted in 2000, were orphan-oriented and should be expanded to all the excluded category of vulnerable children other than orphans to improve grant effectiveness. In 2013 a cabinet decision was made to increase all the grants to N\$250 (US\$16) but the first payments were to be made in the 2014, starting August 2014.<sup>29</sup>

Two factors were imperative in the successful upward review of grants amounts. First, Angula who had ‘blocked’ the reviews had left the influential position of

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Benson Katjirijova, 9 July 2015, Windhoek.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Elma Dienda, 16 July 2015, Windhoek.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Helena Andjamba.

Prime Minister in 2012 and had less influence in his new portfolio as Minister of Defense (December 2012 to March 2015). Moreover, Hage Geingob who replaced him as Prime Minister was not as ambivalent about cash transfers as Angula. The Minister of MGECW, Sioka, relaunched the review proposals in 2013, ‘was successfully supported by Geingob’<sup>30</sup> and the amounts were adjusted upwards. Second, the review reflects partisanship. ‘The adjustments were timely for SWAPO as the amounts were paid in 2014 just before the elections.’<sup>31</sup>

A major reform that resulted in the creation of a mixed CWR was the adoption of the Vulnerable Grant before the 2014 elections. Earlier on in 2010/11 UNICEF, in collaboration with the MGECW, commissioned a grants effectiveness study that recommended ‘a means-tested grant for all poor and vulnerable children’ (MGECW, 2010:52). The Pohamba administration rejected the recommendations to continue with low coverage and ungenerous benefits targeted at ‘broken’ families. The proposed grant would increase coverage of vulnerable children as it would benefit all poor children in kinship care who at the time were eligible for the FCG that restricted enrolment as it required court order placements. The study concluded that the current FCG and CMG schemes excluded a large number of vulnerable children under the care of impoverished parents. About 95% of FCG applicants were extended family members ineligible for the CMG (NPC, 2012). The proposal resonated with the MGECW’s focus to increase the coverage of the two main child welfare grants- the FCG and CMG (MGECW, 2010:153). Having closely worked with Doreen Sioka, the MGECW minister, Petra Hoelscher, former UNICEF Namibia Social Policy Specialist, said:

The minister favoured universal over means-tested child welfare grants because of the large number of vulnerable children beyond those falling under the very narrow definition of poverty, the ease of administration and time freed up for social workers to provide family support, the greater accessibility for the most vulnerable children and the expected benefits for children’s well-being and development.<sup>32</sup>

Minister Sioka submitted the proposal to Cabinet in 2011 and it was disapproved on affordability grounds. Angula said, ‘We [government] did not have the money to start such a big programme for all children. Where will the money come from?’ Affordability was not the only reason for the rejection. Ideologically, political

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Albert Biwa.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Elma Dienda.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Petra Hoelscher, 3 September 2015, Cape Town, South Africa.

elites within SWAPO believed that social cash transfers should only be orphan-focused and parents should work for the welfare of their children. Angula said,

Primarily we should be giving the grants to orphans only and that is what we are doing, but those children whose parents are still there should take responsibility. We will do our best to support the parents. Those parents failing to take care of their children can get licenses for fishing and we have grants for that.<sup>33</sup>

Although the UNICEF recommendations for a means-tested child grant were not implemented, the study, as we shall see, kept the proposals for a poverty grant on the reform agenda until the introduction of the Vulnerable Grant in 2014. Hoelscher said, ‘The 2010 UNICEF/MGCEW study started to raise awareness on child poverty in Namibia and the potential of using child welfare grants as a mechanism to reduce child poverty and improve children’s well-being, including their nutrition, health and education’.<sup>34</sup> Despite the rejection, the government acknowledged in the Namibia National Development Plan Four (2012/3 to 2016/7), that ‘poverty-stricken children that are not classified as orphans are not covered by current social grant schemes’(NPC, 2012:18). The government planned to ‘Expand the social protection system to cover children in all poor households’ (*ibid.*) through introducing a poverty-targeted Kinship Grant (NPC, 2012:67). The Plan outlined two possible child grant reform options: a universal child grant (Kinship Grant) for every child in Namibia or a means-tested child grant with a more generous means-test set at the same level as the war veteran subventions which would cover some 80% of all children.

When the UNICEF proposal was rejected the ILO lobbied for a universal child grant in 2013 which the government also rejected. Following a heightened BIG Coalition (supported by the United Nations Development Programme [UNDP]) push for a Basic Income Grant that would have paid all citizens a monthly cash grant of N\$100 (US\$6) up until pensionable age, at which point citizens become eligible for the existing universal State Old Age Pension (Haarmann & Haarmann, 2007:4), the Parliament of Namibia in 2013 requested for a review of social protection programmes in the country to determine social protection priorities.<sup>35</sup> The ILO and UNICEF, in collaboration with Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW), contracted Oxford Policy Management Limited (OPML) international consultants (supported by national consultants Haimbodi Ya Nambinga and Immaculate Mogotsi) who were more likely to maintain international agencies’ social protection reform agendas in national dialogue, to

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Nahas Angula.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Petra Hoelscher.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Albert Biwa.

establish a comprehensive national social protection floor including a universal child grant.

The assessment revealed coverage and benefit gaps as well as less impact on household welfare. ILO reported corroborative evidence with UNICEF studies that ‘although the country had put in place child grants, the current system did not provide for general support for poor households and children’ (ILO, 2014:137). Moreover, the benefits were inadequate to keep children out of poverty and address multi-dimensional poverty. Existing child grants reduced child poverty by 1.4% only (NSA, 2012a). In view of these gaps the ILO proposed a universal Child Grant that would provide ‘basic income support’ for all children from 2015. The universal child grant would reduce child poverty from 34% to 9% and income inequality (GINI coefficient) from 0.60 to 0.52. The Child Grant (CG) proposal was among other social protection reforms, including a universal Old Age Pension (OAP), Maternity Grant (MG), Disability Pension (DG), Attendant Allowance (AA), and Employment Safety Net Programme (ESNP). Together these constituted a cost of 3.2% of GDP (ILO, 2014:141). The universal child grant would be gradually introduced to children 0-17 years and replace the child and special maintenance grants in phases. It would provide a monthly transfer of N\$250 (US\$16), similar to the current amounts, and was anticipated to cover ‘about 70% of all households’ countrywide and reach more than ‘70% of all social assistance beneficiaries at full scale’ (ILO, 2014:143).

The ILO proposal was rejected more on political than economic considerations by the SWAPO-led government. First, despite the NAMOD evidence that Namibia could afford a universal child grant (Wright et al., 2014), the Ministry of Finance argued that such a grant was not affordable. Iben Nashandi, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare (2015-), Deputy Permanent Secretary in Ministry of Finance, 2012 to 2015, said that a universal child grant was not sustainable because ‘we [Namibia] have few resources to spread over many children including those who do not need them’. Nashandi maintained that expanding the child grants was beyond ‘what the economy can support.’<sup>36</sup> Angula supported the affordability narrative, ‘It’s not affordable to give social grants to all children. Means-testing should stay.’<sup>37</sup>

Second, UNICEF advocacy was strongly weakened by the departure of its influential representative, Hoelscher, who had championed the child grant reform agenda. The lobbying and advocacy for child welfare grants reforms intensified during her time from 2010 as UNICEF Social Policy Specialist but slowed when she was redeployed in 2013. Andjamba stated that Hoelscher’s redeployment

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<sup>36</sup>Interview with Iben Nashandi, 24 July 2015, Windhoek.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Nahas Angula.

affected the universal child grant negotiations as she had established personal relations with the ministers and ‘we [MGECW] spoke to the Cabinet through her since she knew we supported a universal grant. Since she left UNICEF’s influential power had decreased and we are also affected.’<sup>38</sup>

Despite the rejection, the ILO and UNICEF proposals kept the poverty-targeted child grant on the reform agenda but the outgoing Pohamba administration seemed supportive to the proposal to introduce a universal child grant. Pohamba’s Cabinet had already instructed UNICEF and MGECW to explore funding options for the implementation of a universal child grant. UNICEF funded a study that assessed the funding options and recommended that Namibia would fund the universal grant through taxes and levies from financial transactions, electronic funds transfers, national revenue turnover, financial sector and solidarity tax (Mwinga, 2014).

In the midst of these negotiations and instead of adopting the ILO proposed universal child grant, Pohamba introduced a means-tested Vulnerable Grant similar to the UNICEF proposed poverty child grant. The collaborative lobbying efforts of UNICEF and ILO and individuals within the MGECW were crucial in the introduction of the Vulnerable Grant. The Vulnerable Grant rapidly expanded the CWG total coverage, almost doubling to 25% in 2016 from 15% in 2013. To be eligible for the grant, both parents must be surviving but their income should fall below a set income threshold, set at a total monthly household income of less than N\$1000 (US\$63).

Two events occasioned the introduction of the grant. A UNICEF-arranged study tour was crucial in lobbying for political support for the programme. Granvik (2015:3) asserts that among other ‘weapons’, ‘international agencies (such as UNICEF, the ILO and World Bank) and donor organizations (such as the British Department for International Development, DfID)’ persuade national policy-makers through ‘fly[ing] politicians and officials to international workshops and arrange study tours to other countries to learn from their experiences’. In Namibia, international donors and agencies pushed the government through the MGECW. In 2013 UNICEF organized a learning visit to South Africa, led by the MGECW Permanent Secretary and including government representatives from the MGECW, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and Namibia Statistics Agency, to learn about planning, administration and monitoring of social grants and South Africa’s targeting decisions. The visit was important in prompting the policy-makers to critically review how they could address child poverty through the child grant system. Based on their knowledge of South Africa’s experience, the government decided to introduce the Vulnerable Grant along the lines of South Africa’s CSG as a preferred child poverty reduction

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Helena Andjamba.

option to the universal BIG. A decision was also made to keep all the other ‘complementary’ grants (CMG, FPG and SMG) to benefit children requiring special care (orphans, children living with disability).<sup>39</sup>

The adoption of the Vulnerable Grant can be viewed as a rare successful story of policy transfer in Southern Africa, at least for child grants. ‘Countries strategically respond to policies adopted by other countries, emulate policies that turned out successful abroad or react to external pressure to adopt a particular policy’ (Obinger et al., 2013: 112). South Africa has led Southern Africa and Africa in child grants provision but most of its neighbours have not followed its footsteps. Even the introduction of Lesotho Child Grant programme in 2010 is not a case of policy diffusion as the programme was initially donor driven and later embraced by the political elite (Granvik, 2015).

Elections also played an important role. The poverty-targeted Vulnerable Grant could have been used by the ruling SWAPO party for patronage purposes considering that it was announced at a political rally in 2013 by the SWAPO presidential candidate Geingob<sup>40</sup> and introduced in 2014, an election year. This was clientilistic (Stokes et al., 2013) as the grant was a political tool to secure political support, especially by the urban poor voters.

On the other hand, at the time of introducing the grant, the SWAPO administration was under pressure from civil society, NGOs and international donors to introduce both a Basic Income Grant (BIG) and a universal child grant as the flagship poverty reduction schemes. Although there were concerns regarding the form of child grant the government could adopt, the Vulnerable Grant was more favoured than the BIG among the SWAPO leadership.<sup>41</sup> Hence introducing the Vulnerable Grant was a way of escaping from this pressure as well as a way to gain political support from the large numbers of the rural and urban poor and unemployed parents who were not receiving any of the existing grants.<sup>42</sup> In Botswana, the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), under President Ian Khama, reformed the Destitute Persons programme to include previously excluded vulnerable children in the period leading to the 2014 elections. Similarly, the age-reforms of the CSG in South Africa, particularly in 2009, were partly influenced by the ANC’s strategy to avoid introducing a BIG.

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Petra Hoelscher.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Elma Dienda.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Nahas Angula.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Elma Dienda.

### 3.3. Social grants reforms under President Hage Geingob, since 2014

The third and final phase is from the end of 2014 to 2017, during the Geingob presidency. In November 2014 Geingob polled the highest votes in the history of presidential elections in Namibia, winning overwhelmingly with 87% of the vote, but he has not implemented reforms of his own. Instead, he completed universalising free education, a project that started under Pohamba. Without major reforms, Geingob has maintained the mixed CWR.

In the 2014 elections, not only did SWAPO face a fragmented opposition but also the perceived reformist credentials of SWAPO's presidential candidate, Geingob, could have secured SWAPO a large support of the electorate. Geingob seemed in support of the BIG Coalition's proposal for a BIG in Namibia during his time as Vice President and the electorate was very expectant that it would be easy for him to introduce the grant as the president. It seems Geingob was almost determined to fulfill this expectation when he formed a new ministry dedicated to poverty reduction and appointed the former chair of the BIG Coalition, Bishop Kameeta, as the minister. Unfortunately, the BIG idea, hence the voters' expectations, has not materialised. Therefore, in the 2014 elections, voters might have rewarded SWAPO by voting for Geingob in overwhelming anticipation that he would also meet their social protection interests. The result is the continuation of a one-party dominance system and an enduring mixed CWR that is more familial than poverty-targeted.

In January 2016, the Geingob-led government abolished the SDFs for all secondary school children in public schools. Free secondary education benefited 182,945<sup>43</sup> children (19% of all children) at a cost of N\$50 million (US\$31,498,150) for the 2016/7 academic year (*New Era*, 10 November 2015).<sup>44</sup> As discussed, Namibia introduced free primary education in 2012/3. In 2016, free education reached 641,878 children (67% of all children).

Free secondary education was a fulfilment of the election promises made by SWAPO in 2014. The 2014 election manifesto stated that 'In 2013, the SWAPO Party Government abolished the requirement for parents and guardians to pay for school development funds. The same arrangement will be expanded to the

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<sup>43</sup> 2012 enrolments <http://www.moe.gov.na/emis.php> accessed 27 August 2015. Calculating the percentage beneficiaries for primary and secondary using this figure is likely to underestimate coverage as more secondary school children could have enrolled between 2012 and 2016.

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.newera.com.na/2015/11/10/free-secondary-education-2016-hanse-himarwa/> accessed 12 November 2015.

secondary school phase, starting in the 2016 academic year.’<sup>45</sup> *The Namibian* newspaper, 24 March 2014, reported that the announcement was made by then President, Hifikepunye Pohamba, in the run-up to the 2014 elections. Addressing a SWAPO star rally for 2014 elections in Katima Mulilo, Mbumba, SWAPO Party Secretary General, had already indicated that ‘we have introduced free primary education and we have even extended that to secondary level’ (*New Era*, 13 October 2014).<sup>46</sup> Hence, although free education for secondary schools was finally introduced under Geingob’s presidency, it was Pohamba’s legacy as pre-primary and primary fee waivers were introduced and preparations for the adoption of free secondary education started during his presidency.

Overall, the enduring minimalist child welfare regime in Namibia has transformed from primarily targeting ‘broken’ families (familial) under President Nujoma to include poverty-targeting to creating a mixed CWR under President Pohamba. President Geingob has maintained the mixed regime. Until such a time when the Vulnerable Grant is significantly reformed to remove the urban bias and resemble the CSG in South Africa, the CWR in Namibia remains mixed despite being a variant of the South Africa social grants system.

## **4. Explaining the distinctive characteristics of Namibia’s child welfare regime**

The distinctiveness of Namibia’s mixed CWR (the result of the evolution discussed above) is a result of structural, ideological and political factors. The increasing number of OVCs, mostly due to HIV/AIDS, and increasing household poverty, caused by drought and high unemployment, necessitated the change in the targeting form (from broken families to poverty-targeted) and modest expansion of coverage of social cash transfers for families with children. SWAPO’s conservative ideology, its focus on the indigent and preferences for poverty reduction through employment (in farms and formal employment) support a mixed CWR that is ungenerous with low coverage. Politically, the electoral dominance of SWAPO, coupled with a divided and weak opposition and civil society, enabled SWAPO governments to reject proposals for universal cash

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<sup>45</sup> SWAPO 2014 election manifesto, p6, [https://www.kas.de/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=e9a6b462-08ee-cc3f-6630-7ebf77a78651&groupId=252038](https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=e9a6b462-08ee-cc3f-6630-7ebf77a78651&groupId=252038). Accessed 10 June 2015.

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.newera.com.na/2014/10/13/swapo-wont-backpedal-development-mbumba/> Accessed 19 August 2015.

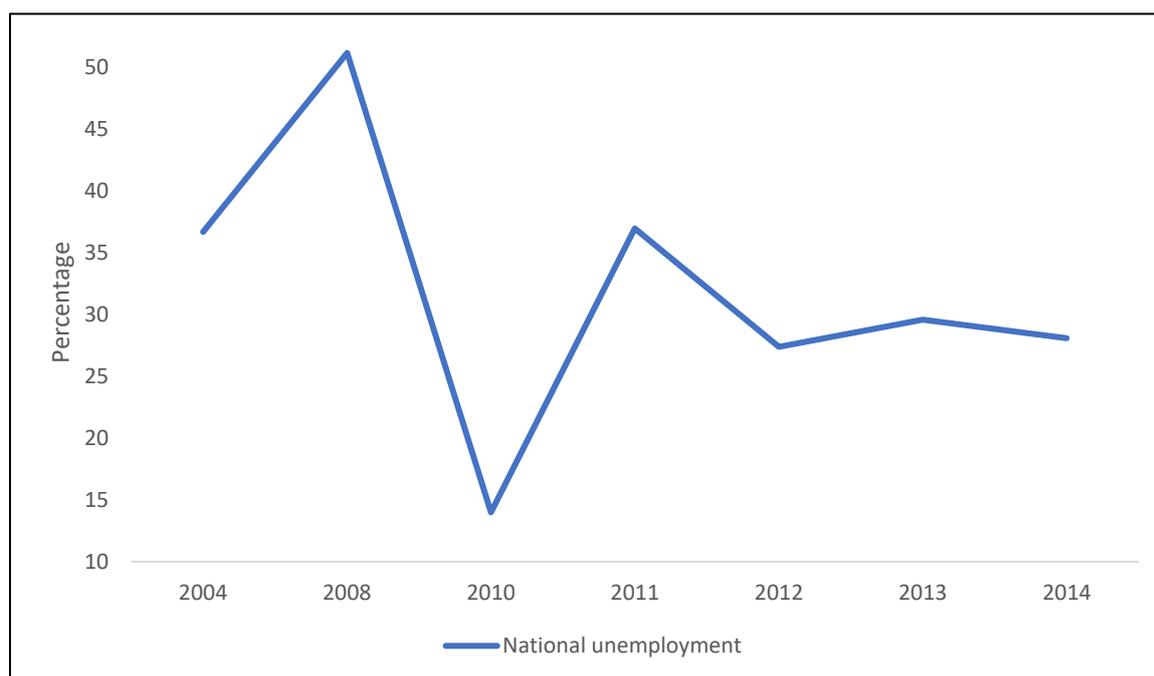
transfers. Despite the failure to convince government to adopt universal programmes, international agencies and donor advocacy efforts urged government to consider the primacy of poverty rather than household composition in designing child poverty reduction. International agencies, particularly UNICEF and the ILO, were important in advocating for the provision of child grants as entitlements. This resulted in legislated provision, the introduction of a near- universal poverty-targeted child grant and universal free primary and secondary education that led to increased, but still low, benefits and coverage.

#### **4.1. 'Structural' factors**

The increasing number of OVCs instigated by structural factors, like the environment, unemployment and demographic changes, contributed to a shift from orphan to poverty-targeted direct income support for families with children. AIDS, surprisingly, was not an important factor despite its effects on household structure. Unlike in Botswana where AIDS necessitated the reforms of the familial CWR, AIDS had limited influence on the reforms of the mixed CWR in Namibia. Other structural factors were important.

Unemployment urged the government to reform child grants through the introduction of a poverty-targeted vulnerable child grant as opposed to other child grants targeting 'broken' families only. The Vulnerable Grant changed the targeting form, and increased the coverage and value of income support for families with children. Unemployment increased the number of vulnerable children who were not covered by the existing child grants and at the same time their parents lacked the economic means to provide for them. High unemployment has been of major concern in Namibia and has left many families with children vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity. President Pohamba singled out 'the lack of employment opportunities available in the country' as the biggest challenge caused by the 'inadequate and volatile economic growth' Namibia has experienced as of 2012 (NPC, 2012: vii). Although unemployment has generally decreased over the years, it remains high (see figure 3).

Figure 3: National unemployment rate, 2004-2014



Source: Namibia Statistics Agency

Nationally, highest unemployment was 51% in 2008, reduced to 37% in 2011 and 28% in 2014 (NSA, 2014b; World Bank, 2016). The minimum in 2010 was likely caused by the end of the Targeted Intervention Programme for Employment and Economic Growth employment programmes that provided employment especially to youth and to those retrenched due to closure of industries (ILO, 2010). Unemployment among youth remains the highest at about 40%. Moreover, as a primary sector economy, the 2008/9 global economic crisis affected the export industry of Namibia. The crisis contributed to the waning demand for Namibia's products leading to closure of industries and job losses through retrenchment (ILO, 2010:7).

In terms of environmental factors, drought induced vulnerability triggered the government to expand the welfare state through introduction of temporary public works programmes and school feeding programmes. Namibia is located between the Namib and Kalahari deserts and most parts of the country constitute some of the most arid landscapes south of the Sahara. As a result, the country receives the least rainfall in sub-Saharan Africa (MoHSS & ICF International, 2014:1). At the same time, 'seventy percent of the population in Namibia relies on agriculture for their livelihoods but due to droughts that weakened the agrarian economy many small-scale farmers especially in the rural areas have been left without employment' (World Bank, 2016). Over 90% of Namibia is arid/desert or drought-prone (Subbarao, 1998:7; Chiripanura and Niño-Zarazúa, 2013) and the government has initiated food/cash for work programmes in response to drought.

President Pohamba declared the 2012/3 agricultural season an emergency due to drought that reduced crop production by 48% and as part of food security, the state sought to strengthen and expand ‘safety net programmes such as the school feeding programme, food-for-work and cash-for-work programmes’.<sup>47</sup> In other countries in Southern Africa and other regions, the recurrent problem of drought-driven food insecurity urged countries to develop and expand social welfare policies that indirectly benefit children.

The 2012/3 drought was instrumental in the government’s decision to introduce the Vulnerable Grant for children from poor families. Helena Andjamba said, ‘Many children especially with both parents unemployed were left exposed by the drought as many parents could not afford a meal or pay school fees for their children in secondary school.’ The failure of poor parents (both husband and wife living with their children) to provide for their families in cases of drought and floods, as was experienced in 2011, became ministers Doreen Sioka and later Rosalia Nghidinwa’s rallying point in arguing for a grant that covers poor children regardless of the survival status of their parents.<sup>48</sup>

## 4.2. Ideological factors

The earlier adoption of a familial and the later shift to poverty-targeting to form a mixed CWR, with low coverage and ungenerous benefits, reflect SWAPO party’s conservative ideology, individual beliefs and influence among politicians and bureaucrats within SWAPO and government. SWAPO leadership believes poor but able-bodied people should work for their upkeep and social assistance should target those who cannot work, such as the elderly and children, hence child welfare grants have remained targeted (not universal) with low benefits and coverage. Most of the influential political leaders in SWAPO, Nujoma, Pohamba, Geingob and Angula, hail from northern Namibia, known for its agricultural economy, and they all were involved in subsistence farming in their early life. They are against ‘handouts’ as they believe people should work for their income security through employment - formal or self-employment in the form of farming or income generating activities. Nujoma himself comes from the North and worked for his well-being in the farms (Nujoma, 2001) and assumes the poor should follow the same approach to social protection. To promote work-based welfare, the MGECSW has a poverty reduction programme that provides funds for

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<sup>47</sup><https://reliefweb.int/report/namibia/president-declares-drought-emergency>  
[https://www.unicef.org/drr\\_epr.html](https://www.unicef.org/drr_epr.html). Accessed 3 July 2015.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Helena Andjamba.

women and men to embark on Income Generating Activities (IGAs). Income Generating Activities promote self-employment among the urban and rural poor communities. Providing such funding opportunities ideologically encourage families to participate in their own economic development rather than rely on government child grants. Child grants are, therefore, regarded as an incentive for economic emancipation, especially for unemployed caregivers.

Pohamba shared Nujoma's ideology having grown up in the north where people used to make life through farming in the fields and argues that people (other than children, the elderly and disabled who cannot work) should not receive cash for doing nothing but should look for employment and if they do not get it they should work in the fields. Yet the SWAPO leadership is detached from the reality that the government is performing poorly in employment creation, the land is no longer productive, people lack farming inputs and most rural areas are constantly hit by drought.<sup>49</sup> The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) in Namibia reported that 64% of extremely poor households owned land (CBS, 2006:91) and households that report 'subsistence farming' as their main source of income reduced from 35% in 1993/4 to 23% in 2009/10 (CBS,1996; NSA, 2012b).

Targeted programmes with low coverage and benefits are partly explained by Nujoma's beliefs which became SWAPO's ideology and are fostered on succeeding presidents and other important policy makers in government. France Kaudinge, SWAPO Director of Administration, pointed out that SWAPO believes 'the less fortunate should not be condemned and excluded from benefiting from Namibia's resources since they are all Namibians. The focus on those who cannot support themselves especially the disabled, the elderly and children has been informed by this view, our party view which becomes government policy.'<sup>50</sup> As espoused in its 2009 election manifesto, SWAPO regards social grants (cash transfers) as social safety nets that should address 'the plight of vulnerable groups of our society, especially orphans and vulnerable children, senior citizens, war veterans and people with disability'.<sup>51</sup> The 2014 election manifesto promised 'continued support to the vulnerable groups within the society through the improvement of safety nets and other social support services.'<sup>52</sup> Tom Alweendo, Director General of Namibia National Planning Commission showed more support for targeted than universal programmes when he said 'poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon and ... can be addressed

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Elma Dienda.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with France Kaudinge.

<sup>51</sup> 2009 SWAPO election manifesto, p20, accessed 30 June 2015, <https://sadbcblog.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/swapo-2009-manifesto-namibia.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup> 2014 SWAPO election manifesto, p21.

through ... targeted programmes and projects according to peculiarities of particular area of interest' (GRN, 2012:7).

Individual philosophies (of presidents, ministers and representatives of UN agencies) played significant roles in CWGs (failed) reforms. Most of the reforms occurred during Pohamba's presidency (2005-2015). Other than his reluctance to review the amount of child grants for fear of abuse by caregivers,<sup>53</sup> Pohamba was more supportive of the expansion of CWGs. Sam Nujoma had equalized the grants amounts across races but only focused on orphans and excluding other vulnerable children. Nujoma did not make an attempt to provide general income support for poor families with children. Nujoma adopted a pauperist approach to social provision as he believed that social protection should only target the indigent hence he was anti universal benefits.<sup>54</sup> Accordingly, Nujoma was the first president to reject the BIG and reviewed child grants amounts only three times in the 15 years he was president.

Pohamba was different as he was more open to reform the CWR. For his part, Pohamba introduced a disability grant for children under 16 years, introduced free primary education and made preparations for the adoption of free secondary education, adopted a poverty-targeted Vulnerable Grant and legalized the administration of child grants through the Children's Act. When he left presidency in 2015 his government was at the verge of adopting a universal child grant which UNICEF representative, Hoelscher, had advocated for in collaboration with the equally enthusiastic Ministers of MGECW, Sioka, and Rosalia Nghidinwa (2012-2015). The reforms resulted in poverty targeted rather than orphan targeted grants, expanded coverage and a regime guided through a legal framework. Pohamba became conformist when he reintroduced school development funds in 2006, first rejected proposals to fee waivers in 2007 but later yielded to pressure to abolish primary school fees from his minister of education, Nickey Iyambo, in 2013, rejected proposals for a universal Kinship Grant in 2012 and a universal Child Grant in 2013. The result was a CWR that maintained a benefit gap (low value relative to the poverty line) as Pohamba did little to change the value of the grants.

Rejections of universal programmes, particularly the child grant and BIG, and irregular review of child grants amounts which led to low coverage and benefits, are also attributed to the continued influence of Nujoma on policy-making despite that he left government as president in 2005 and left active politics as SWAPO president in 2007. Nujoma who was honoured by Namibian parliament and his

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Gerson Uaripi Tjihenua.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Claudia Haarman and Dirk Haarman, BIG Coalition Secretariat, 13 July 2015, Klein, Windhoek.

party as ‘Leader of the Namibian Revolution’, ‘Founding Father of the Namibian Nation’ and ‘National Chairman of SWAPO’ is still influential in policy decisions as he attends meetings of two governing bodies of SWAPO - the Central Committee and Politburo – and sits in SWAPO Party Elders (SPECs). Nujoma still plays the important advisory role both to SWAPO party and presidents.<sup>55</sup>

The continued parsimonious benefits and coverage are partly due to SWAPO’s ideology. SWAPO ‘could be considered as a party with trends towards neo-liberalism and social democracy with some diehards supporting democratic socialism and Marxism’ (Toetemeyer, 2007:3). Yet its approach to social protection show high degrees of conservatism. The conservative SWAPO governments rejected proposals for universal child grants. Political elites are ambivalent about providing social cash transfers ‘to too many children’.<sup>56</sup> The same conservatism applies to the general welfare regime in Namibia where SWAPO governments have also rejected proposals to adopt a universal Basic Income Grant (BIG). The BIG was part of the proposals of the Namibian Tax Consortium (NAMTEX) in 2002 to achieve equitable distribution of resources. BIG was to pay all Namibian citizens a monthly cash grant of N\$100 (about 14 US\$), as a citizen’s right, up until pensionable age, at which point citizens become eligible for the existing universal State Old Age Pension of N\$370 (about 53 US\$). Despite efforts by the BIG Coalition<sup>57</sup> to convince the government to adopt BIG, the SWAPO administration under Nujoma, Pohamba and now Geingob rejected the proposals, maintaining the inequality the programme sought to address. Angula’s preference for employment creation, worry about dependency and skepticism about ‘handouts’ are reflected in his beliefs:

I would rather have the BIG money used in skills development to empower people not to be dependent on government. I want people to be empowered not just to be given. I believe in the Chinese saying that give somebody a rod not fish.<sup>58</sup>

As a result of the rejection of BIG and a universal child grant but with the introduction of the Vulnerable Grant, Namibia’s CWR continue to differ with the

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<sup>55</sup> Interview with France Kaudinge.

<sup>56</sup> Separate interviews with Nahas Angula and Iben Nashandi.

<sup>57</sup> On April 27, 2005, the BIG coalition was officially launched in Windhoek by the Council of Churches, the National Union of Namibian Workers, the National NGO Forum, the Namibian Network of AIDS Service Organisations, the Legal Assistance Centre, and the Labour, Resource and Research Institute. See Claudia Haarmann and Dirk Haarmann (eds) (2005) [http://www.cdhaarmann.com/Publications/BIG\\_Resource\\_Book.pdf](http://www.cdhaarmann.com/Publications/BIG_Resource_Book.pdf). Accessed 30 June 2015. See also Claudia Haarmann and Dirk Haarmann (2007).

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Nahas Angula.

country's general welfare regime that does not provide general support to poor people.

### **4.3. Political factors**

Individuals within government, combined with intra-party politics, were important in the reforms of the mixed CWR. The 'stagnation' in reforms between 1994 and 2012 broadly reflect SWAPO's conservative ideology prioritising the preservation of 'broken' families but primarily show Angula's influence before and while he was Prime Minister. Angula was a very influential individual within SWAPO having served as minister in different portfolios since independence in 1990. Angula, like many political elites within SWAPO, was anti-cash transfers arguing that they are 'handouts' causing 'dependence.'

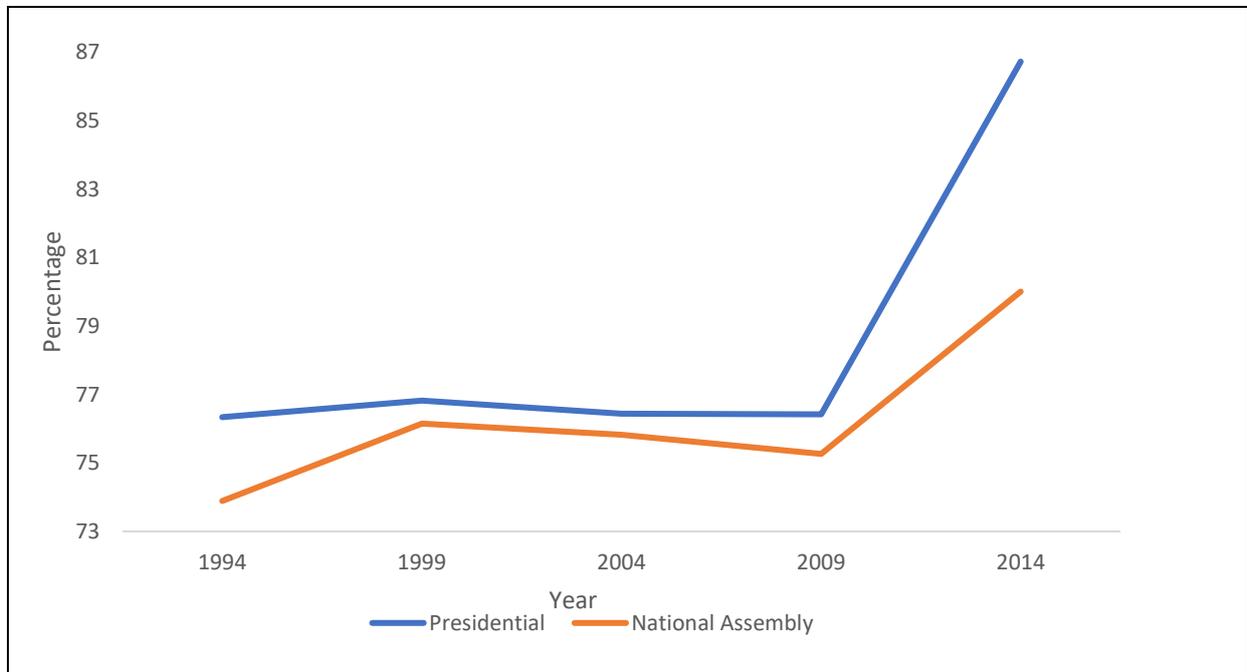
Angula has harbored presidential ambitions since the 2004 congress and he used his influential position on social policy, rejecting proposals for reforms. Angula lost the fight for SWAPO presidency to Pohamba in 2004. In office, Pohamba replaced Angula with Geingob but Angula was reassigned to the defence ministry. Angula was still hopeful to land the presidency but Pohamba anointed Geingob his predecessor when he appointed him deputy in 2012, forcing Angula to resign from active politics.

Geingob was different from Angula. It is unclear why Geingob finally landed the presidency ahead of Angula but it is likely that Pohamba and Angula did not agree much in terms of social and other party policies. As discussed, Pohamba was pro-reforms in contrast to the conservative Angula. Geingob's influence on social policy as Prime Minister is also unclear but most of the reforms happened during his time as Prime Minister into his presidency - from 2012 when he became Prime Minister to 2014/15 when he became President - suggesting that he was a reformist like his anointer but in contrast to Angula. The change of prime minister in Namibia was important in similar ways to the change of presidents in South Africa affecting reforms when a populist Zuma succeeded Mbeki.

Lack of political competition between SWAPO and other political parties to reform social policy has resulted in low coverage and parsimonious cash benefits but international pressure led to a shift from orphan to poverty-targeted policy and a CWR guided by legislation. Since independence, Namibia has remained a 'dominant party state' (Toetemeyer, 2007). SWAPO has been comfortably winning both presidential and national assembly elections since independence in 1990 (see figure 4), giving it the political power to control political policy and decision-making process in Namibia. SWAPO's electoral dominance has become

‘a near-permanent feature of the post-apartheid political landscape’ (Du Pisani, 2013:133).

Figure 4: SWAPO’s share of vote, 1994-2014



Source: Electoral Commission of Namibia<sup>59</sup> \*The share of vote for other parties was not included because there are many opposition parties sharing the outstanding vote.

SWAPO is opposed by ‘some small, mostly ethnic based political parties’ that are weak hence ‘there is no political counterweight of any relevance’ (Toetemeyer, 2007:2). SWAPO, whose political support thrives on ethnic voting particularly by the Oshiwambo-speaking tribe (Du Pisani, 2013:133), owes its dominance to ‘lack of challenge than to its own strength’ (Diescho, 1996:15). Du Pisani (2013) further argues that SWAPO’s dominance of electoral politics is the absence of ‘any credible prospective challengers in sight’. But with regard to child social protection, SWAPO made programmatic efforts through adopting social transfers for all caregivers with school going age (free primary and secondary education and the Vulnerable Grant) and unemployed or employed but poor parents who were struggling to provide for their children. These programmes typified SWAPO’s programmatic child social protection. SWAPO’s programmatic cash transfers for families with children resonated with the new constituency of unemployed caregivers. Du Pisani (2013:141) posits that SWAPO’s ‘ability to spend large amounts of public money on targeted social investment programmes’ has won the Party support. Du Pisani argues the introduction of a N\$19 billion (US\$11,969,297,110) Targeted Intervention

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.ecn.na/results>. Accessed 16 May 2015.

Programme for Employment and Economic Growth (TIPEEG) job creation project that appealed to unemployed Namibians, given the 50% unemployment rate, as one such programme. It has become common for incumbents to gain political support by introducing cash transfer programmes that meet the needs of their constituencies. President Ian Khama and his Botswana Democratic Party were partly voted back into power in 2014 as their constituencies rewarded Khama's programmatic efforts to redress high unemployment by rebranding the public works programme, *Ipelegeng* (Hamer, 2016). *Bolsa Familia* contributed to the incumbency of President Lula in Brazil's 2006 elections (Zucco, 2008). Progressa beneficiaries were more likely to vote for the incumbent in Mexico (De la O, 2013). Consequently, cash transfers 'enable ruling parties to build the political support critical in order to secure incumbency' (Sandberg & Tally, 2015:505). Since SWAPO implemented programmes that were more likely to generate political support from the working poor and unemployed both in urban and rural areas, its dominancy and the expansion of cash transfers for children through such programmes are explained by 'programmatic mobilization', where programmes foster the 'incumbency effect' (as in the case of Mexico's Presidential elections in 2000), more than clientelism (De la O, 2013).

Nevertheless, the weak opposition (due to leader competition and ethnic differences) has not been sufficiently strong to push SWAPO to expand the existing grants, review the benefits regularly and introduce universal child grants that would widen the coverage. Comparatively, although the opposition in Botswana is fairly strong and has challenged the BDP to reform social policy, in both countries the opposition has failed to push the ruling parties to widely expand cash transfers. A weak opposition combines with a weak civil society. Despite the establishment of Namibian Non-Governmental Forum Trust (NANGOF), the umbrella board for civil society in Namibia in 2007, civil society advocacy efforts are not well coordinated. Ivin Lombardt, NANGOF Director, Mahongora Kavihuha, Secretary-General, Trade Unions Congress of Namibia (TUCNA) and John Muniaro, Secretary-General, National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW)<sup>60</sup> bemoaned the lack of space for social dialogue by the ruling SWAPO but agreed that due to civil society fragmentation, none of their organizations had advocated for the reform of child grants. A weak civil society means the SWAPO government lacks the necessary pressure from such organizations (as in South Africa) to implement social policy reforms hence child grants benefits and coverage have remained low and not universal.

International pressure to reform child grants from donor and UN agencies urged the government to shift from orphan to poverty-targeted grants. Hoelscher,

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<sup>60</sup> Interviews with Mahongora Kavihuha, 12 July 2015, Khomasdal; Ivin Lombardt, and John Muniaro, 23 July 2015, Katutura, Windhoek.

UNICEF Social Policy Specialist, working closely with a supportive minister, Sioka, Mbombo (Acting Permanent Secretary) and bureaucrats such as Andjamba (Director: Child Welfare Services), successfully advocated for the inclusion of cash grants on the agenda. From 2007 UNICEF started to fund studies to urge the government to expand the child social protection system through reforming the child grants (UNICEF, 2007; MGECW, 2010; NSA, 2012b; Mwinga, 2014; Wright et al., 2014; GRN, 2015a & b). Up-to-date evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, on the current situation of children in poverty and the role of the social protection system has led to broad-based support for an expansion of child welfare grants. The National Development Plan Four, for example, outlined two possible child grant reform options: a universal child grant (Kinship Grant) for every child in Namibia or a means-tested child grant with a more generous means-test set at the same level as the war veteran subventions which would cover some 80% of all children.

UNICEF created a strong evidence base and advocacy for the expansion of child welfare grants to all poor and vulnerable children, particularly between 2010 and 2014. Technical support to the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (MGECW) and the National Planning Commission (NPC) on a qualitative assessment of the effectiveness of the current social protection system in addressing child poverty in Namibia, created ownership of the child poverty agenda in the two key ministries involved in poverty reduction (MGECW, 2010). UNICEF collaboration with the Namibia Statistics Agency led to the publication of the first child poverty report for Namibia, including an assessment of the impact of CWGs on poverty rates and a simulation and basic costing of alternative policy options (means-tested or universal CWG) (NSA, 2012a). UNICEF successfully advocated for the inclusion of child poverty and the expansion of the child welfare grant system in the Fourth National Development Plan (NDP 4) (NSA, 2012b). Presenting, for the first time, evidence on child poverty and the potential role of child welfare grants in reducing high child poverty rates, led to a shift in public debate away from OVCs – which in Namibia means mostly orphans – to a broader look on child poverty and other vulnerabilities.

Subsequently, child poverty was recognized as national problem that needs to be tackled and government partners acknowledged the targeting of CWG towards orphans leaves the majority of poor and/or vulnerable children without support. Furthermore, UNICEF provided technical support to the Ministry of Finance to develop a tax-benefit microsimulation system (NAMOD) which allows the assessment of the impacts of the social grant system and personal taxation on poverty, household expenditure, and income inequality as well as modelling and costing of alternative policy options, including an increase of social grants, changes in eligibility and new policies (Wright et al., 2014). This gives Ministry of Finance the possibility to generate themselves the evidence for the efficacy of an expanded child welfare grant system and its required resources.

The WFP also contributed to grants coverage in 2006/7 through financial support to register more beneficiaries but the assistance was part of a short-term food aid project. When the project ended in 2007, there was no traction in efforts to expand the grants through enrolling more children on the programme by the government. The pressure to introduce a universal child grant did not result in the desired policy outcome but urged the SWAPO administration to reconsider the inclusion of vulnerable children through a Vulnerable Grant. In effect, the welfare state expanded, albeit modestly. But the introduction of this grant is more likely going to curtail the UNICEF push for a universal child grant. Iben Nashandi, Deputy Permanent Secretary in Ministry of Finance (2012-2015) and Permanent Secretary in Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare from 2015, said, 'I am not a proponent of any type of universal social assistance.'<sup>61</sup> Nashandi's view contradicted the beliefs of his minister, Bishop Kameeta. Nashandi, an economist, believed a universal child grant would perpetuate inequality as it 'lifts both poor and rich children from poverty without closing the poverty gap.'<sup>62</sup> Nashandi was correct but he underestimated the reality that a universal grant would close the poverty gap.

On the other hand, competing interests (with the same reform agenda) between UN agencies and international donors in advocating for different policy options led to stagnation in child grants reforms, resulting in continued grants that do not cover all deserving children. While UNICEF (Mwinga, 2014) and the ILO (2014) are advocating for universal child grants, the World Bank and UNDP are pushing for the BIG. Monalisa Mbakumua Zatjirua, Acting Social Policy Specialist, Programme Officer - Child and Social Protection at UNICEF Namibia, indicated that UNICEF is not against BIG as it would still be a universal programme benefiting all children, but the 'delays in approval of the BIG proposals were worrisome and another form of a universal grant in the form of a child grant was necessary'.<sup>63</sup> The simultaneous proposal of two universal policy instruments to address poverty partly explains the delay in Cabinet decision-making as Cabinet debates whether to adopt one or both programmes.<sup>64</sup> Herbert Jauch, former BIG Coalition Chairperson and current Education Coordinator at Metal and Allied Namibian Workers Union (MANWU), saw proposals of a universal child grant

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<sup>61</sup> Interview with Iben Nashandi.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Iben Nashandi.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Monalisa Mbakumua Zatjirua, 20 July 2015, UN House, Klein Windhoek, Namibia.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Albert Biwa.

as ‘confusing the recipient government’ as it might have distracted considerations for the BIG which was proposed earlier than the child grant.<sup>65</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

Child welfare grants in Namibia, like in South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe, started as familial and minimalist, with state provision focused on orphans or single-mother households. The adoption of child welfare grants at independence reflects Namibia’s colonial history, and specifically South Africa’s rule. The failure to follow South Africa’s lead in introducing a CSG, and the later slow expansion of pro-poor provision, reflect domestic politics and international influence.

Namibia sustained a familial child welfare regime between 1990 and 2013. The limited reforms between 1990 and 2013 demonstrate the influence of domestic politics (one party dominant system or lack of electoral competition; political elites/individuals within government (not) embracing proposals for reforms). The later expansion of child grants as part of general support for poor children through the Vulnerable Grant is a delayed but successful case of policy transfer (Obinger et al., 2013; Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; 1996; Marsh & Sharman, 2009). Dolowitz and Marsh (2000:5) view policy transfer as political actions where ‘knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system. Obinger et al. (2013:112) argue that countries ‘emulate policies that turned out successful abroad or react to external pressure to adopt a particular policy’. The success of the CSG in neighbouring South Africa, where Namibian officials from the ministry responsible for CWGs visited, had a positive effect on the ideological shift from orphan to poverty-targeted child social protection. Learning from and emulating the South African model of child provision were critical in the modest expansion of Namibia’s mixed regime. Overall, the addition of a poverty-targeted grant to familial child grants to create a mixed (familial-pro-poor) child welfare regime was a result of successful advocacy by international agencies and organisations.

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with Herbert Jauch, 16 July 2015, Windhoek West.

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## Appendix 1: Existing child-focused social grants in Namibia

Programme	State Maintenance Grant	Foster Parent Grant	Special Maintenance Grant	Vulnerable Grant
<b>Target group</b>	Orphaned children	Orphaned children	Children living with disabilities	Children from poor households
<b>Eligibility criteria</b>	Child under 18 who has lost one (single parents) or two (married couples) biological or adoptive parents. Not means tested.	Enrolment at government school	Presenting at clinics: Children <6 years Pregnant women	Due to disabilities or chronic ill health, incapable of sustainable economic activity, has insufficient assets and income sources (<4 LSU or gets <P120/month single, <P150/month with dependants) or incapable of sustainable economic activity, unreliable and limited sources of income due to old age, disability, terminal illness. Permanent: completely dependent, not suitable for rehabilitation. Temporary: suffered disasters, family crises etc., expected to exit.
<b>Targeting mechanism</b>	Categorical + community: referral by Village/Ward Social Welfare Committee, VDC or other leaders or concerned individuals for registration by local authority. Orphan or caregiver may also apply directly	Categorical	Categorical	Proxy means testing + community: referral by Village/Ward Social Welfare Committee, VDC or other leaders or concerned individuals. People may also apply directly to these committees or to S&CD
<b>Coverage</b>	National	National	National	National but still disproportionately accessed by caregivers in urban and peri-urban areas.
<b>Value of transfer</b>	N\$250	N\$250	N\$250	N\$250 (US\$30)
<b>Retargeting frequency</b>	annually	n/a	n/a	annually
<b>Graduation criteria</b>	Reach 18 <sup>th</sup> birthday	Reach 18 <sup>th</sup> birthday	Reach 17 <sup>th</sup> birthday and start on Disability Grant	Reach 18 <sup>th</sup> birthday