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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE FORMER TRADITIONAL AND THE LATER FORMAL: AN EVOLUTIONARY ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION IN GHANA.

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Abstract

This study looks at social protection from the indigenous African point of view and looks at the trajectory it has taken to its current state with reference to current trends in social protection. Social protection has been a phenomenon within societies since humans started living together in settlements. In the pre-colonial African societies, traditional social protection was institutionalized in the extended family system, to take care of the vulnerable. Social protection appeared in various forms to help alleviate poverty in traditional African societies. After the independence of African states and the quest for rapid socio-economic development, segments of the population have been left in the quagmire of poverty and deepening state of desperation. Social protection offered by the extended family has been deficient as the demands of modernity have had a heavy toll on the traditional structures. The path to socio-economic development has always left patches of poverty and suffering necessitating social protection programmes to mitigate the suffering of the masses. Governments are left with no choice but to intervene in the field of social protection and thereby, bringing a transition from 'traditional' social protection to 'modern' or 'formal' social protection.

This paper investigates the traditional forms of social protection and the factors that have caused the relative weakening of such traditional forms of social protection. This paper also looks at the development of modern forms of social protection in Africa with examples from the Ghanaian setting.

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Introduction:-

Some scholars believe that the traditional or indigenous ways of alleviating poverty have not worked in the third world. Failure of the traditional ways were attributed to rapid population growth, land fragmentation, lack of land reforms, political instability and the list goes on (Ahmad, 2001, p.51). Social protection has been regarded by various developmental stakeholders as a right of every individual if the fight against poverty would ever be achieved (Otoo and Osei-Boateng, 2012). Social protection has become a developmental and political mantra for governments of developing countries for the past few decades. It must however, be noted that, social protection as it appears in modern African states, like Ghana, is the end result of several strands of social policy, from European social security systems to humanitarian relief interventions. Contributory social security mechanisms such as unemployment insurance and pensions were imported to Africa during the colonial era. Such colonial social protection policies

covered only a minority (formal sector employee of the colonial administration) within colonial societies (Devereux, 2013, p. 13). Social protection in Africa today has come about as a result of the blend of a rich, complex and diverse pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial experiments and experiences geared towards poverty alleviation and the maintenance of minimal standards.

Social protection has gone through phases and has evolved from the pre-colonial era to its present state. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the effects of economic recession and structural adjustment since the 1980s added some impetus and caused a number of international agencies and some African states to emphasize social protection as a useful strategy for positive change (Umukoro, 2013). In the 1980s and 1990s, during the years of structural adjustment, there was a heightened level of hope across Africa that if states remained disciplined and endured the short-run social hardships the long-run benefits would be enormous. Due to the economic hardship that developing states had to endure during the years of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), the levels of impoverishment for the vulnerable increased across the poor regions of the globe as evident in Africa and Latin America (Hutchful, 2002; Kelly, 2001). This necessitated the call for putting a 'human face' to adjustment by some non-governmental organizations and some United Nations agencies.

Towards the end of the 1990s, consensus was reached between the donor community, the United Nations and the developing countries on the International Development Goals (IDG). The principal objective of the IDG was to reduce by half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015. If poverty reduction would be achieved, social protection would be instrumental in this agenda. An analysis of the changes and the dynamics of social protection in developing economies ought to be considered.

Methodology and Research Questions:-

This study was conducted within the broad framework of the qualitative research. It employed content analysis approach where existing materials in relation to the evolution of social protection were studied. The discussion in this paper was drawn from available literature. Discussions focused on the research questions below:

1. What is social protection?
2. What was the nature and forms of traditional social protection prior to the emergence of the modern state and its social intervention policies?
3. How different are the forms and nature of modern social protection from traditional social protection?
4. How has social protection evolved over time, in the quest of Ghanaian governments to alleviate absolute poverty?

Contextualization of Social Protection:-

Social protection, to the different economic regions of the world, denotes different issues and approaches, which are embedded within the social, political and economic contexts of the different regions. In the developing world, social protection has a strong focus on poverty reduction and the provision of support to the poorest of the society (Barrientos, 2010, p. 2). The developing world, sees social protection as a policy framework for addressing the problem of poverty, deprivation and vulnerability. In the developed countries, one sees the emphasis of social protection being on income maintenance and on the protection of minimum standard of living for citizens.

Social protection, being a tool for poverty reduction, has been identified to engulf various programmes that are state sponsored and geared towards providing assistance to individuals who are in dire need of support in order to fight against poverty. In consonance with the statement that social protection is a governmental or state policy at poverty alleviation, social protection has been defined as "public actions taken in response to levels of vulnerability, risk and deprivation which are deemed socially unacceptable within a given polity or society" (Conway, de Haan and Norton, 2000, p. 3; Norton, Conway and Foster, 2001, p. 7).

Standing (2007) on the other hand, defines social protection as "the full range of protective transfers, services, and institutional safeguards supposed to protect the population 'at risk' of being 'in need'" (p. 512). According to standing (2007) social protection should be protective of the vulnerable segments of the population. The Ghana School Feeding Programme comes as a protective scheme for children of school going age in Ghana

Social protection being public and state sponsored, therefore, engulfs a wide range of policies and programmes that protect and promote decent livelihoods and secures the welfare of people suffering as a result of extreme and chronic poverty and deprivation and to provide shocks for the vulnerable segment of the population. Social

protection comes as assistance in the form of a state sponsored social programme with the intention of benefiting the public and it is intended to prevent and ameliorate the severity of poverty and sometimes, to remove the vulnerable from the state of extreme poverty and deprivation.

Traditional Social Protection:-

The phenomenon of social protection policies and programmes are not entirely new in Africa. There had always been a form of social protection in the traditional African societies. Social protection is not strange to the traditional African societies. It has always been in existence dating back to the era pre-dating writing, which is evident from the sayings and proverbs of Africans. Traditionally, the extended family created the platform for the provision of social protection. Otoo and Osei-Boateng (2012), emphasised this point by noting that African societies have traditionally relied on the extended family system. The traditional African family system took great responsibility in taking care of the needs of all members of the family, ranging from children to the aged. The poorest of people had always relied on one form of informal or traditional social protection which was based on the extended family system, religious group to which one belongs or the community from where one comes or lives in. There were also community norms and obligations put in place to help vulnerable individuals and families (Sultan and Schrofer, 2008; Chitonge, 2012; Otoo and Osei-Boateng, 2012).

Traditional social protection was provided and cut across the various age brackets provided there were individuals who needed assistance. Needy members of the community: infants, orphans, sick, poor, the aged etc., were all covered by the traditional system of social protection. All vulnerable groups within the society had a safety net in the extended family system (Osei-Boateng, 2012). Informal social protection mechanisms ranging from kin-based support systems and local credit societies and faith-based networks have long existed in Ghana, although the more traditional kin-based mechanisms are declining in importance under the influence of urbanisation and demographic changes (UNICEF, 2009).

Giving accounts of indigenous social protection in pre-modern African societies, Ouma (1995), explained that Ugandans for instance, lived and survived as ethnic nationalities in definite geographical zones on the basis of kith and kin. The indigenous and traditional authority that was at play in those societies were exercised through a system of clan leaders (elders and heads of household). Such a system was influential and very effective in the identification and maintenance of strict social control and order in situations where there were no distinctions between home and place of work. In those systems, everybody knew each of his/her neighbours sufficiently and intimately (Ouma, 1995).

The underlying principle of traditional social protection was identified to be 'collective responsibility'. Ouma (1995) intimated that, "in such areas as housing, creating and maintaining access roads, farming, food harvesting and its storage, hunting down wild animals and destroying vermin that were a potential danger to both human security and food crops, caring for the elderly and the sick, consoling and assisting the clan/family members in bereavement to mention but only a few of the instances based on mutual-aid assistance and reciprocity" (p. 5-6). Members of the family saw the needs of others connected to their own, hence were collectively responsible for each other. The poverty of a member was regarded as an affront on the image of the entire extended family. It was based on this principle that family members came to the aid of vulnerable family members in the seasons of their vulnerability.

In the traditional African societal setting, one qualified to be covered by social protection policies based on some social principles like reciprocity, altruism, social cohesion and personal intimacies. When a member of the society exhibits these qualities, they were sufficient to guarantee social protection in both good and bad times. Social protection in the traditional sense was extended to all members of the ethnic nationality to ensure that there was equity and social justice. "There was thus no talk of famine or homelessness in precolonial times. Social protection was total, resulting in extensive local commitment to culture and tradition and indeed area based development" (Ouma, 1995, p. 6)

Some contributory factors to the erosion of traditional social protection and the adoption of modern forms of social protection. Colonisation and modernization of Africa were concluded to have destroyed the erstwhile serenity and the mutual social support systems in indigenous African societies. Ouma (1995) gave accounts of the forms that the destruction took. Three forms were identified:

1. the dispossession of the local populations (ethnic nationalities) of the political power to manage their own affairs and determine their own destinies, and the transfer of this to the relatively inaccessible, alien and bureaucratic Protectorate Government with its headquarters in Entebbe;
2. the introduction of money as the sole medium of exchange for goods and services: transactions which had previously been rendered on the basis of bartering; and mutual-aid benefit support schemes, in turn inspired by reciprocity, altruism and social cohesiveness; and
3. the promotion of the distinction between home and place of work through the introduction of towns as administrative and commercial centres, besides the other centres of concentrated activity such as mines and plantation agriculture” (p. 6).

Modern Social Protection in Africa:-

Social protection has now moved from the realm of the family, community or traditional area, to the national level. This ‘formalization’ of social protection, has gradually removed the burden of social protection from the family to the state.

Modern or formal “social protection in contemporary Africa is the product of several strands of social policy, from European social security systems to humanitarian relief interventions” (Devereux, 2013, p. 13). The current social protection policy agenda in Africa is not indigenous to the African continent but rather, largely imported from the Western nations that had colonized African states. The initiation of Africa into the formal social protection sphere started with the adaptation of European social security models, which were first applied to the formally employed workforce in the African countries. This came in the form of contributory pensions and unemployment insurance. It was not, until recently extended to the informal and self-employed sectors in the form of targeted cash transfer programmes such as ‘social pensions’ in most African countries (Devereux, 2013).

Another important development that took place in Africa in relation to social protection development was the ad hoc humanitarian responses by the international community to food security shocks in Africa. This approach to dealing with the humanitarian crisis later developed into “quasi-institutionalized social assistance and social insurance mechanisms such as public works programmes for the seasonally underemployed and weather-indexed insurance for farmers” (Devereux, 2013, p. 13).

Formal social security systems originated as a policy response to the excesses that accompanied the great transformation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe. During the period of the great transformation, liberal market economy gained ascendancy. There was rapid industrialization in the urban centres which attracted huge rural populations and this resulted in massive social dislocation. There was a resultant intervention in the market economy with the aim of securing the cultural and social integrity of humanity and of society. This intervention sought to protect society against the negative consequences of the free market system. To Devereux (2013), the double impact of urbanization and industrialization had two implications for the evolution of social protection. On one hand was the ‘demand for’ and on the other was the ‘supply of’ social protection.

On the demand side, farmers had lost their source of livelihood due to migration to the urban centres where their survival had shifted from the land to the labour market. With the influx of labour from the rural agrarian centres to the urban industrial centres, labour became very cheap and wages dropped. Workers now had less to spend on bare survival needs. With the worsening situation, such workers call on the state to protect them from the hardships that arose as a result of market economics.

On the supply side of social protection, urbanization and industrialization weakened the informal or traditional forms of social protection such as kinship relationships and community belonging which were based on the “behavioural principles of reciprocity, redistribution and house holding” (Devereux, 2013, p. 15). The market had weakened the effective relationship as a result of migration which was necessitated by the need for labour in the industrial urban centres. The responsibility that guaranteed individual and family subsistence which were at the behest of the family, relatives, neighbours and the community shifted to the market and the state. In order to sustain the industrialization drive, the labour force must be kept active and productive, the need arose for an institution to take up the role of the family, neighbour or community in providing for them when they are in need of such support.

To provide this support, the market introduced some measures to provide the safety net for the urban labour force. There was the introduction of two programmes to provide support to the urban dwellers. The first, “adults with

labour capacity need (contributory) social security for periods when they are not working – unemployment insurance, retirement pensions and paid maternity and sick leave. Dependants who are not working – children, older persons, people living with disabilities – need state-funded (non-contributory) social welfare if their private support systems are inadequate” (Devereux, 2013, p.13). Bismarck devised a model which was successfully implemented in the United Kingdom following the 1942 Beveridge Report which “argued that for a social insurance system that would guarantee a minimum standard of living below which no one should be allowed to fall” (Devereux, 2013, p.13).

More formal social protection began after World War II with the introduction of pensions for public employees and formal private sector workers. However, these social security mechanisms still cover only about 10% of the population, leaving unprotected the vast majority of the poor, who earn their livelihoods in the informal sector.

Modern forms of social protection have therefore, become necessary as a result of the double impact of globalization and urbanization which have weakened the hitherto traditional system of social protection. The modern political system has lost the values of the traditional political system that made social protection the obligation of the whole community. The capacity of the community within which one lives to provide social protection to the vulnerable has also declined as a result of urbanization (Otoo and Osei-Boateng, 2012). The onus now, lies with the state to take care of the vulnerable. The state has therefore, developed a myriad of social protection schemes right from independence till date.

Social Protection in Ghana:-

Since Ghana’s independence in 1957, the various governments have put in place a wide range of social protection programmes, all geared towards the protection of the vulnerable and the segment of the population living in poverty. Some of the social protection policies include; free healthcare, free education, scholarship for Ghanaians from the northern regions, SSNIT pension scheme, Programme of Action to Mitigate the Social Cost of Adjustment (PAMSCAD), Free Compulsory and Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), Free Maternal Healthcare, Capitation Grant, National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP), Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP), National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), the Ghana Schools Feeding Programme (GSFP), Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship Agency (GYEEDA) etc.

Until recently, when the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) was instituted to co-ordinate the various social protection programmes, the challenge to effective social protection in Ghana since independence according to Sultan and Schrofer (2008), had been the lack of a social policy framework that links the various initiatives, policies and programmes into a coherent whole. The National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) was therefore established in 2007 to express the Ghanaian government’s vision of creating an all-inclusive and socially empowered society through the provision of sustainable mechanisms for the protection of persons living in situations of extreme poverty and related vulnerable exclusion.

The development of every nation hinges on the human capital which is always the product of its educational system. Over the years, there have been several interventions by governments to make sure that education is at its best in the country. There have been several educational reforms and policies which aimed at, among other things, increasing enrollment, attendance and retention. Such interventions in the educational sector include free education, student loan scheme, scholarships schemes, FCUBE, capitation grant etc. One of the recent educational policies is the Ghana School Feeding Programmes (GSFP).

School feeding is the provision of food to school children. School feeding has been classified into two main groups based on their modalities: in-school feeding, where children are fed in school; and take-home rations, where families are given food if their children attend school (Bundy, Burbano, Grosh, Gelli, Jukes and Drake, 2009). School Feeding has been recognized as an effective programme that alleviates hunger while supporting education, health and community development. Bundy et al (2009, p. 13) continued to suggest that “school feeding programs are often used for social protection purposes as much as or more than for education goals. The programs provide an explicit or implicit transfer to households of the value of the food distributed, with the value of the transfer varying significantly from in-school snacks at the lower end and large take-home rations at the upper end of the spectrum” They are of the opinion that school feeding has the overall objective of providing a productive safety net as part of the response to the social shocks of the current global crises, and a fiscally sustainable investment in human capital as part of long-term global efforts to achieve Education for All (EFA) and provide social protection for the poor.

Evolution of Social Protection:-

In the developing world, one tool that has been used to tackle poverty has been social protection. Social protection has become one of the most relevant poverty alleviation mechanisms. Social protection emerged as a result of factors including natural disasters, declining national economic fortunes, conditionalities of international financial institutions, the increasing and devastating effects of globalization among others. One major factor that brought the concept and the spread of social protection in the developing countries across the globe was the rise in poverty and vulnerability which followed the economic crises and structural adjustment in the 1980s and 1990s. These challenges have, however, persisted in the recovery phase, requiring action on the part of national governments to insulate their vulnerable populations from slipping into a state of destitution (Kalusopa, 2012; Adesina, 2011; Barrientos, 2010).

Current social protection policy agenda in Africa is not indigenous but largely imported. Two specific trajectories of social protection in Africa are identified. Firstly, the adaptation of European social security models, these were applied to the formal employees in colonial Africa. They were in the forms of contributory pensions and unemployment insurance. The other trajectory started with the international community's ad hoc humanitarian responses to food shortages in Africa. There was then the development of quasi-institutionalized social assistance and social insurance mechanisms (Norton, Foster and Conway, 2001).

Formal social protection did not evolve in a vacuum. It was in responses to some situations that adversely affected human development. Social protection according to Norton, Conway, and Foster (2001), has long been a domestic concern of wealthy nations, and they have developed sophisticated institutional arrangements in order to protect their citizens against risk and provide assistance to the poor. This, had not been the case in the developing countries of the world where poverty and deprivation are very high. The preoccupation of the developing countries instead has been on the primacy of economic growth.

Since the late 1980s, policy attention shifted from mere economic growth to social protection instruments that were intended to mitigate the cost of structural adjustment in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Social protection has been recognized as a very useful intervention strategy that can yield positive dividends. Social protection came in as the most appropriate policy instrument of choice for addressing poverty and vulnerabilities that had increased and in some cases arisen as a cost of the structural adjustment programme for the restructuring of the economies of the LDCs. These vulnerabilities had come about as a result of the failures of the market.

The Social Dimensions of Adjustment (SDA) programme was launched by the World Bank as an appropriate response to the mounting evidence of the severe social cost of the orthodox Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). The SDA as launched by the World Bank, involved the use of safety nets to address the social costs of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). The SDA strictly targeted the segment of the population considered to be in situations of high levels of impoverishment.

Ghana was among the first category of countries to have attempted to put a "human face" to structural adjustment. Due to the realization of the social costs that the structural adjustment programme had brought on the country, the Ghana government introduced the Programme of Action to Mitigate the Social Consequences of Adjustment (PAMSCAD). PAMSCAD have been followed by a number of programmes and policies targeted at mitigating against the high incidences of poverty among Ghanaians.

In Ghana, as in other sub-Saharan African states, social protection has become relevant in the fight against poverty. Such commitment to poverty alleviation came as a result of factors including natural disasters, declining national economic fortunes, conditionalities of international financial institutions, the increasing and devastating effects of globalization among others. One major factor that brought the concept and the spread of social protection in the developing countries across the globe was the rise in levels of poverty and vulnerabilities following the economic crises. The remedy to the economic crises called for the implementation of structural adjustment in the 1980s and 1990s. These challenges have, however, persisted in the recovery phase, requiring action on the part of governments to insulate their vulnerable populations from slipping into states of destitution and want (Kalusopa, 2012; Adesina, 2011; Barrientos, 2010).

Conclusion:-

The public provision of social protection in sub-Saharan Africa is not new. However, the discussion on public social protection in this paper has revealed that its scope in terms of mechanisms and its beneficiary coverage in many countries are narrow. The spread of social assistance programmes that provide conditional or unconditional transfers in cash or in kind, and the production of social protection policy frameworks and strategy documents are the new dimensions of social protection in several sub-Saharan African countries.

For social protection to serve the intended purpose of alleviating abject poverty, there should be a concerted effort at combining the indigenous forms of social protection with the state sponsored forms of formal social protection. Due to the inherent flaws in formal social protection, the traditional/indigenous forms cannot be left out of the scheme of programmes when it comes to social protection. It is also crucial and worth noting that the indigenous forms of social protection have not been unable to offer the forms of cushioning it used to give to its members due to the dwindling capacity and influence of the indigenous traditional institutions including the extended family system. In offering social protection in Ghana, the state should endeavour to empower some traditional institutions like the chieftaincy institution in order to offer to support and complement the state in taking care of the vulnerable and underprivileged.

Social protection, whether traditional or modern, has become the single most important tool for dealing with poverty. A two prong approach of traditional and formal social protection should be promoted to reduce poverty and destitution.

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