

SOCIAL PROTECTION BRIEF

Effective social protection measures for vulnerable women in Africa



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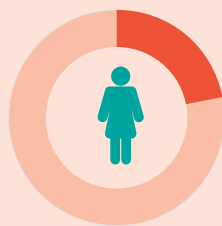
Introduction

Social protection (SP) measures address poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion among the most vulnerable members of society. Effective SP programs are urgently needed in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), where over 1.2 billion people, mostly women, have no social protection coverage.

Uganda's national SP system rests on the two pillars of social security and social care and support.ⁱ Following the launch of its National Social Protection Policy in 2015, the country has made important strides in the development and implementation of SP interventions, including the Senior Citizen Grant for persons aged 80 years and above, the National Social Security Fund amendment Act 2021, and the recent National SP Strategy of 2024–2029.ⁱⁱ These efforts notwithstanding, poverty remains widespread, affecting roughly a quarter of the population. Currently, one in five Ugandans lives in extreme poverty, and **more than a third of the country's population lives on less than \$1.90 a day**.ⁱⁱⁱ Poverty in Uganda has a predominantly female face: The 2019–2020 Uganda National Household Survey found that female-headed households had a higher poverty rate (22 percent) than male-headed households (19.5 percent).^{iv}

Sustaining and scaling up Uganda's gains in SP and ensuring that vulnerable women are not left behind require initiatives with proven effectiveness. Driven by our mission to improve evidence-informed policymaking for women in SSA, ICRW Africa conducted an evidence synthesis to identify SP measures with demonstrated efficacy in addressing the socioeconomic and health issues of poor and vulnerable women in SSA. This brief highlights the effective SP measures in an effort to inform SP policy and programmatic action in Uganda.

22%



The Uganda National Household Survey (UNHS) shows that female-headed households had a higher poverty rate (22 percent) than male households (19.5 percent)

Effective social protection measures for vulnerable women in SSA

Effective social protection interventions	Proven impacts	Supporting research
 <p>Cash transfers</p> <p>Direct payments to individuals or households from a government or organization. These can be conditional or unconditional.¹</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved women's economic security, (better savings, more resilience to economic shocks, establishment and expansion of women's businesses) Improved household food security Improved women's agency and decision-making power Reduced risk of participation in risky sexual practices Improved health outcomes (better access to health services, improved nutrition, improved treatment outcomes, increased access to maternal health services, including family planning) Improved mental health (reduced drudgery, stress, and economic anxiety) 	<p>Haushofer and Shapiro^v</p> <p>Pega et al.^{vi}</p> <p>Karimli et al.^{vii}</p> <p>Baird et al.^{viii}</p> <p>Tuthil et al.^{ix}</p> <p>Gobin et al.^x</p> <p>Joshi et al.^{xi}</p> <p>Palmer et al.^{xii}</p>
 <p>Land transfers</p> <p>Allocation of land and farms</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved women's economic security (increased women's asset ownership, improved income stability, enhanced economic diversification, increased productivity and financial independence) Improved nutritional outcomes Improved productivity among women 	<p>Joshi et al.^{xi}</p> <p>Alik-Lagrange et al.^{xiii}</p> <p>Verma^{xiv}</p> <p>Grat and Kevane^{xv}</p>
 <p>Food transfers</p> <p>Provision of food items²</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved nutritional outcomes and medication adherence Improved food security and overall well-being Reduced sexual risk-taking 	<p>Kadota et al.^{xvi}</p> <p>Belete and Bayu^{xvii}</p>

¹ Unconditional Cash Transfer (UCT): A cash transfer made without any conditions required for the recipient. Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT): A cash transfer made on the condition that the recipient meets specified criteria.

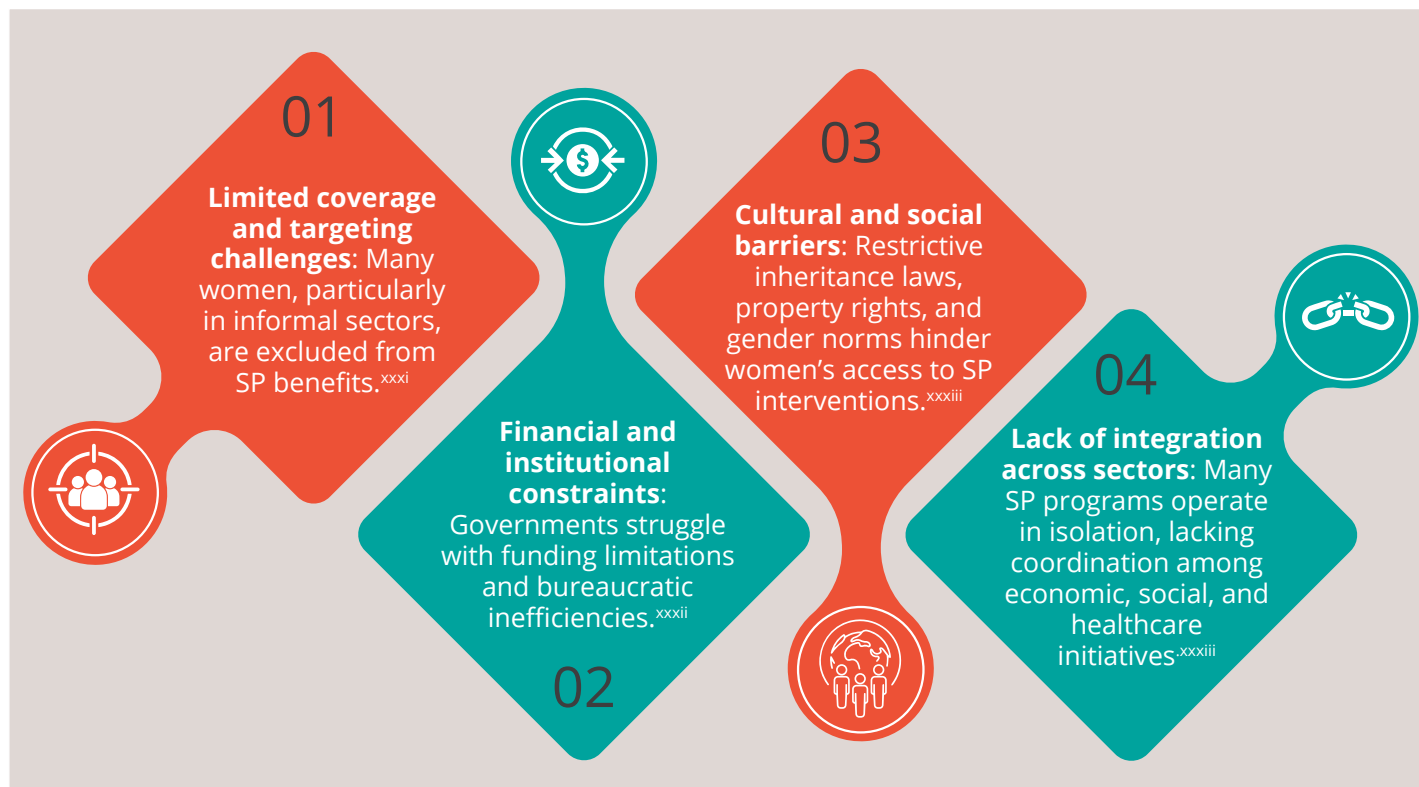
² Items are delivered as part of unconditional public distribution programs or conditional interventions, such as school meal programs.

Effective social protection interventions	Proven impacts	Supporting research
 <p>Financial inclusion and credit access</p> <p>No collateral requirements, access to microfinance, government-backed lending programs, and cooperative savings initiatives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased women's economic empowerment (women able to start and sustain businesses) • Strengthened women's financial resilience (income-generating activities) • Reduced poverty, financial indebtedness, and dependence 	<p>Bongomin et al.^{xviii}</p>
 <p>Universal health coverage and insurance schemes</p> <p>Free health insurance schemes, fee waivers, free maternal health services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased healthcare utilization • Reduced catastrophic expenditure • Improved health outcomes, including sexual and reproductive health and rights outcomes • Reduced maternal morbidity and mortality 	<p>Edoka et al.^{xix}</p> <p>Mulat et al.^{xx}</p> <p>Ugo et al.^{xxi}</p> <p>CluverLucie et al.^{xxii}</p> <p>Okeke et al.^{xxiii}</p>
 <p>Public works and employment guarantees</p> <p>(often designed as workfare initiatives)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced women's labor market participation • Improved income security • Diversified income sources for women • Improved job skills for women 	<p>Alik-Lagrange et al.^{xiv}</p> <p>Austrian et al.^{xxiv}</p> <p>Mohapi^{xxv}</p>

Effective social protection interventions	Proven impacts	Supporting research
 <p>Education subsidies and child support grants</p> <p>Education subsidies</p> <p>Free tuition, vouchers, school feeding programs, textbook provisions, and cash incentives for school attendance</p> <p>Child support grants</p> <p>Cash transfers to families with children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved school retention rates and academic outcomes for young women • Better grade completion rates for young women • Reduced financial burdens on families, improving both nutritional and educational outcomes 	<p>Milimo et al.^{xxvi}</p> <p>Pettifor et al.^{xxvii}</p> <p>Patel et al.^{xxviii}</p>
 <p>Social and legal protection policies</p> <p>Legal reforms addressing gender-based violence, inheritance rights, and property ownership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of gender equality • Enhanced women's socio-economic participation • Protection of women's rights 	<p>Peterman et al.^{xxix}</p> <p>Angelucci et al.^{xxx}</p>

Gaps in Social Protection Implementation

Though effective, social protection measures in SSA face several challenges such as:



Policy and Programmatic Implications

To improve the effectiveness of SP interventions for women, policymakers should:

1. **Implement and scale up proven SP measures** such as cash transfers and targeted health subsidies.
2. **Integrate multi-sectoral approaches** by combining SP interventions with economic empowerment initiatives.
3. **Develop context-specific programs** tailored to the needs of different demographic groups, including adolescent mothers, rural women, and elderly women.
4. **Enhance research and evaluation** to generate evidence on the sustainability and comparative effectiveness of various SP programs.
5. **Monitor the impact** of SP interventions.



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Endnotes

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