

Evaluating South Africa's Child Support Grant Policy: Critical Considerations

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Abstract: The evaluation of public policies assists in ascertaining the extent to which a policy meets its objectives. The paper is conceptual in nature and aims to emphasise the significance of public policy evaluation, particularly highlighting critical considerations to be made when evaluating one of South Africa's social policies, namely, the Child Support Grant (CSG). The paper opted for a qualitative desktop study with data stemming from journal articles, books and document analysis. The paper provides conceptual insights on the significance of evaluating public policy and critical considerations to be made when evaluating the CSG. It indicates that concerning the CSG, the focus is often on implementation and impact, and there are not sufficient evaluations conducted. Furthermore, it suggests that in conducting an evaluation on the CSG, other factors from the external environment which have an influence on the uptake of the grant should be considered. The little evaluation that has been conducted on the CSG policy is outdated and therefore excludes present day conditions thus prohibiting a comprehensive and up to date evaluation of the policy. The paper adds value not only by highlighting the significance of public policy evaluation, but also the critical considerations that should be made in the process, particularly with the CSG. This is of interest not only to policy makers, but to South African citizens at large as the policy affects the national budget allocations, taxpayers, caregivers and their dependents and government in general.

Keywords: Child Support Grant, Evaluation, External Environmental Factors, Public Policy

1. Introduction

Masses of people in South Africa (SA) rely too heavily on the government's Child Support Grant (CSG) initiative. Approximately 3.2% of SA's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was consumed on social grants. This demonstrates a considerate government regarding the poor, however, on the other hand, one that struggles to create sufficient employment opportunities (Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, 2017).

According to Surrender, Noble, Wright and Ntshongwana (2010), among developing countries, it is only SA that spends as large as it does on social grants. Children in SA make up 35% of the population and from that figure 62% are child support grant recipients (Hall, Richter, Mokomane & Lake, 2018). At the end of the 2018/2019 financial year, there were 12 452 072 CSG recipients (SASSA Annual Report, 2019). In comparison to other social grants, the CSG is the biggest in terms of numbers. However, when comparing social grant expenditure per grant type, the Older Persons Grant is the highest (R70 635 272 033,96) with the CSG following at R60 611 568,81 (SASSA Annual Report, 2019).

The cause for the CSG not being the highest in terms of expenditure is because its value is approximately a quarter of the value of the Old Persons Grant. Currently, the monetary values for the year 2020 are R445 and R1 860 respectively (Mboweni, 2020). Although the CSG is not intended to replace household income, but to rather supplement it (Twine, Collinson, Polzer & Kahn, 2007), research indicates that a significant number of households solely depend on the grant (Xaba, 2016). The high dependence on the CSG, inter alia, warrants an evaluation of the policy. There are not enough reviews and policy evaluations from the government conducted on the CSG, the focus on existing studies is often on implementation of the programme and impact thereof rather than a comprehensive overview that also considers other external environmental factors which have an impact on the grant. The existing reviews are not only lean in nature, but are outdated.

The existing literature on South Africa's CSG policy also lacks reference to the international context. The lack of evaluation on the CSG could result in government losing sight of performance of the programme and thereby blindly enter in conditions of

wasteful and fruitless expenditure by dedicating resources on items that do not heed a return on social investment among other risks. The solution therefore to avoiding problematic incidents and to keeping up to date with recent trends in the programme is through evaluating the CSG policy, including highlighting the critical considerations that should be made. This should be done by firstly defining the purpose and scope of the CSG. Next, relevant data pertaining to the outcomes of the CSG should be collected then analysed. The factors to be considered should be highlighted followed by a conclusion and recommendations.

2. Background on Child Support Grant

Children should be primarily cared for by their families, the government is meant to provide infrastructure and a safe living environment (the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). At the same time, Chapter 2 (27)(1)(c) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa stipulates that all citizens have the right to access social security, including appropriate social assistance if individuals are unable to take care of themselves and their dependents. Individuals who receive social assistance from the government in SA typically belong to designated groups such as persons living with disability, old age people and children (Xaba, 2016). The SA government implements various social assistance grants, however, social assistance had not always been equally available to everybody.

Post SA's 1994 elections which were the first to be democratic, the newly elected government sought to assess the state of social welfare in SA in particular, among the black population. In 1994, the government at the time under President Mandela established a Lund Committee to examine the state of social welfare in the country, including child support, and the committee developed a concept of the child support grant, which was implemented from April 1998 (Xaba, 2016).

The CSG replaced the State Maintenance Grant (SMG). The difference between the two is that one was implemented during apartheid and the other post-that era, therefore making the SMG discriminatory in nature as it mostly catered to white citizens (Coetzee, 2013). The SMG was prone to sharp criticism for not only its racial distribution, but that of geographical too. It was reported that in no more than 0.2% of black children received the SMG and

that those who resided in rural areas lacked access to the grant due to issues such as awareness, transportation and administrative (Patel & Plagerson, 2016, as cited in Delany, Jehoma & Lake, 2016).

The CSG is designed to relieve children from poverty (Khosa & Kaseke, 2017) and this is done through a cash transfer method where funds are disbursed to CSG beneficiaries (Moodley & Slijper, 2016). A means test is conducted prior to receiving the grant (Coetzee, 2013). The monetary amount of the CSG began at R100 per month in April 1998 and 20 years later, it was R400 per month in April 2018. When the grant was introduced it merely included children under the ages of 7 years, currently the grant covers children up until 18 years. For a child to be a recipient of the CSG, their primary caregiver is required to apply at SASSA.

3. Methodological Approach

The study relied on a qualitative research design using desktop research to provide a critical analysis of evaluation of the child support grant policy. Data was collected from research articles, books, published reports, including government publication. Desk research was selected as the available literature review assisted with contextualising the CSG in the context of SA. The sources used in the study namely, annual reports and published government data had also been used in studies that included empirical research, thereby ensuring reliability. Bowen (2009:31) states that documents are "unobstructed" and "non-reactive" thus unaffected by processes in research, for that reason, a desktop research was deemed appropriate for the study. Moreover, desk research tends to be a low-cost technique in comparison to field work, the selection of this method by the researcher ensured cost effectiveness.

In analysing the data, document analysis was used through which the researcher first skimmed over the text data, followed by reading with understanding and finally interpretation. In interpreting the text data, content and thematic analysis were utilised. With content analysis, text data was organised into categories such as CSG benefits and challenges. With thematic analysis, patterns were identified from the information such as improved nutrition and access to the grant and thus became categories for analysis. The research design was able to fit the research question in that literature available

provided answers to the questions related to CSG including policy evaluation. The limitations of the study included relying on secondary data which might not synchronise with the most current events.

4. Child Support Grant Outcomes

There were 12 269 084 recipients of the CSG during the 2017/2018 financial year (SASSA Annual Report, 2018) and this figure constituted 62% of the nation's children (Hall *et al.*, 2018). Between the years 1998 and 2018, the age threshold for receiving the grant has increased. In 1998, only children up until the age of 7 were eligible for the CSG. In 2003, the age threshold increased to the ages of 9 and below. Furthermore, the age was increased again in 2004 to children under the ages of 11 while in 2005 it comprised of children aged 14 years and below. Finally, in 2012 the CSG covered children until the age of 18 (Naicker, 2016). Increasing the age limit of the grant has provided the opportunity to extending coverage to several additional poor children than ever before. The change over the years in age thresholds has followed Charles Lindblom's incremental model where small changes are applied gradually rather than making radical ones (Anyebe, 2018). Using such a technique is good as it allows room for learning, monitoring, and modifying, however, it is equally disadvantageous considering the delay in time e.g. not covering as many poor children in South Africa as early as possible.

Authors such as Brynard (2006), Coetzee (2013) and Delany, Grinspun and Nyokangi (2016, as cited in Delany, Jehoma & Lake, 2016) view the CSG as successful in alleviating poverty. According to Grinspun (2016) the provision of the CSG has assisted in increasing poorest of households' income by 10 times more and bringing down income inequality by 25%. For many CSG homes, the grant is the only income received by the household regardless of the number of children; the presence of the grant therefore unquestionably makes a difference as without it there would be no income. Xaba (2016) notes the child support grant to decrease hunger, contribute to greater attendance in schools and generally increase household income.

Biyase (2016) agreed with the child support grant increasing school enrolment, the author asserts that the existence of the grant increased the likelihood of school enrolment by 10% points. Children from deprived households have therefore benefited from

the CSG in that they now can attend school without obstacles such as hunger or lack of school uniform. Furthermore, by attending school, these children can break the generational curse of poverty in their families as education provides opportunities that allow for such. Moreover, the grant has been attributed to contribute to the health of recipients as nutrition improved (Mudziringi, Moyana & Mbengo, 2016). This implies that caregivers are better able to provide more food for beneficiaries' thereby decreasing hunger. With the aid of the grant, caregivers have also reported to purchasing bigger quantities of food and a variety thereof (Grinspun, 2016:45) which contributes to improving nutrition.

5. Complications with Child Support Grant in South Africa

Several challenges were identified and raised over time with the CSG. There are claims made about the value of the grant not being sufficient for basic needs (Wright *et al.*, 2015; Mudziringi *et al.*, 2016; Grinspun 2016). The grant was designed to supplement household income (Twine *et al.*, 2007), however, several households exclusively depend on the grant (Xaba, 2016), which is therefore likely to result to the perception of the set amount as being insufficient. The CSG has been alleged to promote pregnancies especially among teenage girls (Brynard, 2006; Mbulaheni, Kutame, Francis & Maluleke, 2014) whereas authors such as Makiwane (2010) and Grinspun (2016) found no relationship between the grant and child bearing.

Another study revealed that teenage pregnancies were most probably a result of a lack of age appropriate sexual and reproductive services. High records of teenage girls who terminated their pregnancies at public hospitals were notable; these are the same girls who would be fitting to receive the CSG thus implying that falling pregnant was not a means to get to the grant. What is more is the value of the grant was said to be not big enough of an incentive (Grinspun, 2016). There appears to be no consensus among authors regarding fertility and the CSG, however increasingly, there seems to be no scientific evidence pointing towards girls falling pregnant with the intention of receiving the grant. Albeit as high as 62% of children in South Africa utilise the CSG (Hall *et al.*, 2018), there are potential beneficiaries who qualify for the grant but do not receive it due to access issues such as incomplete or missing documentation required for application

processes (Brynard, 2006). Effective communication from the government appears to be the lacking component concerning access.

While several potential recipients might be excluded, 23% according to Naicker (2016), certain beneficiaries who do receive the grant are accused of misusing it. Money is said to be spent on gambling, alcohol, and clothes for their bodies, however it is said that ultimately, the CSG is directly used in the interest of children (Khosa & Kaseke, 2017). Obtaining the child support grant is attributed to discourage caregivers from finding employment opportunities and therefore result in being too dependent on the government (Mudzingiri *et al.*, 2016) which authors such as Mbulaheni *et al.* (2014) view as a poverty trap. On the contrary, Grinspun (2016) stated that there was no evidence to support such claims. In fact, the author pointed out that receiving the grant provided caregivers with means that would enable them to conduct a job search. Surender *et al.*, (2010) had earlier shared the same sentiments. Receiving the CSG allows caregivers to have the financial means of conducting a job search. This includes transport fares used in the process of the job search such as when going to an interview. Gomersall (2013) had also dismissed claims of the grant discouraging caregivers from finding work. With the grant value being modest as it is (currently R445), it doesn't seem logical to be an incentive enough for an individual to be discouraged from a job search especially when also considering the rise of the cost of living.

Some government officials are accused of fraud and of not being helpful to applicants, thereby discouraging them with the process of applying for the grant (Mirugi-Mukundi, 2010). SASSA was also established with the intent of avoiding mal-administration and other fraudulent activities (Brynard, 2009). In the financial year 2018/2019, SASSA had 662 of reported fraud and corruption cases for investigations (SASSA Annual Report, 2019). This appears to also be an area that government should be earnestly evaluating; corruption not only creates financial losses but also threatens social development in the case of CSG policy.

6. Critical Considerations to be Made when Evaluating the Child Support Grant Policy

It is good that existing studies have extensively covered the benefits as well as the challenges

associated with receipt of a CSG. However, the grant needs to be evaluated while also taking into account other relevant factors from the external environment that might have an influence on it, particularly uptake. By considering external environmental factors when evaluating the CSG, the analysis provides a greater perspective of how and why the programme is performing in the manner that it does. In evaluating the CSG policy, several external factors that have an impact on the uptake of the grant should be considered. One of these factors from an economic domain, include employment rates. The higher the unemployment figures the more likely that there would be a high uptake of the CSG. Moodley, Chiba and Patel (2017) confirmed that adult unemployment was the main reason for why many children in SA lived in poverty. The SA unemployment rate is high; at the second quarter of 2020 it was at 23% (Statistics South Africa, 2020). Economic growth in SA has generally been low which worsens poverty and inequality (National Treasury, 2019) and the need for social assistance.

Understanding the trends in population growth is another factor to consider when evaluating the CSG. SA's population rate has been on the rise resulting to additional applications submitted for the CSG. The 2020 mid-year population was estimated to be 59.62 million (Statistics South Africa, 2020). Additional social factors to be reflected upon include fathers who do not provide financial support to their children. South Africa faces a significant societal challenge of absent fathers (Chauke & Khunou, 2014) the less fathers who provide financial support the more likely a rise in the number of applications submitted for CSG. The availability and accessibility of other social services should also be considered in the evaluation of the CSG policy. These services include inter alia, National School Nutrition Programme, free-fee schools, job-seeker support for youth, support in housing and support programs for caregivers (Shung-King, Lake, Sanders & Hendricks, 2019). Such services complement the CSG. The political environment is a further area that must be considered during the evaluation process of the CSG. The grant competes with many other government programmes that require resources from the national budget. The National Treasury, through the Minister of Finance delivers a national budget speech annually on the last working day of February (Mboweni, 2020). The more important and bigger an issue is perceived to be, the more funding it is likely to receive.

In the past, technical glitches in the social grants administration including CSG had resulted to some beneficiaries not receiving their pay outs on time. This was largely due to SASSA's transitioning from the service cash paymaster services to the South African Post Office (SASSA Annual Report, 2018). For persons living in extreme poverty, one late payment could have a series of negative ramifications. It is imperative for the Government to fully comprehend the technological environment it operates in, employ optimal technological options, and keep abreast with the environment to ensure the effective administration of the CSG.

The global environment is another external factor to be considered when evaluating the CSG. Government should compare itself with other countries, especially developing countries in the South African case that also make use of cash transfer methods to combat child poverty. Such an analysis provides lessons for the future and an indication of how the CSG performs compared to other similar programmes in other countries. By taking cognisance of the above external factors when evaluating the CSG policy, feedback from the evaluation will be able to provide not only the extent to which poverty is alleviated, but also what more could be done, enhanced or discarded from a strategic point of view to improve policy performance. More than improving the administration of the policy and ensuring sufficient impact on recipients, the comprehensive information would assist the State in lowering the number of citizens who depend on the CSG by addressing other matters that would help in this regard such as addressing social ills, improving the economy and employment, investing in appropriate information and communication technology, and drawing lessons from the global sphere.

7. Significance of Evaluating Public Policy

The state should take full responsibility for its implemented public policies through policy reviews and evaluations on a regular basis, especially considering the volatile environment that has become the state of the norm in South Africa. Roux (2002) stated that public policy is continuously subject to the effects of environmental change and influence. It is imperative for public policies to be evaluated to ascertain the extent to which they have met the intended goals. The public policy making process places evaluation at the tail end. This should not be

the case. Evaluation should be a continuous process that is conducted from the beginning of the public policy making process as this would assist in identifying any threats or opportunities that need to be identified and addressed in real time. In fact, Greve (2017:124) is of the view that evaluation should influence the public policy making process by being the "central driving force of decision making". Evaluating public policy is not only important for determining the outcomes and effect of programmes but for accountability as well.

According to Venetoklis (2002) government should be accountable for the evaluation of public policy to citizens as they are taxpayers and are affected by budget allocations and should therefore be satisfied with the manner funds are spent on public policies and the outcomes thereof. Additionally, Venetoklis goes on to emphasise that feedback is required by institutions and public officials responsible for policy planning and implementation to help them with the improvement of policy operations that are ongoing or those planned for the future. Furthermore, Brynard (2009) highlights the importance of civil society pertaining to policy making, although Brynard is referring to planning and implementation, his civic engagement notion confirms that government is accountable to the public regarding policy evaluation.

A disjuncture is noted within the public policy making process. After laws have been passed, those specialising in policy making and legislative processes lose interest in what happens afterwards and those that are responsible for implementation and evaluation are focused on policy design and implementation (Vedung, 1997). The development of public policies and plans is the responsibility of national government with those responsible for the final implementation communicated very little with thus a gap created in policy causing problems of disconnection (Brynard, 2007). To conduct well reviewed and evaluated policies, it is essential to examine the public policy making process in its entirety and for the agents of the policy to improve communication and reporting amongst each other. Satumba, Bayat and Mohamed (2017) stressed for the child support grant policy to be monitored and evaluated in order to ensure that significant impact on the poor was achieved; however, Anderson (2014) warned that it was impossible to quantitatively measure the effectiveness of policies, more especially social policies with complete accuracy. Nonetheless, policy evaluation assists in determining the necessary adjustments to policy.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

The right to social security is upheld by SA's Constitution and the CSG is one of the programs that assist in this regard. The CSG has progressively improved from the time it was first introduced in 1998 replacing the then biased SMG which excluded a majority of black citizens from the social welfare. The CSG has played a critical role in alleviating poverty as evidence depicts decreased hunger; a contribution to greater attendance and enrolment in schools; improved nutrition and a general increase in household income. Challenges associated with the CSG included the value of the grant; pregnancies especially among teenage girls; access issues; misuse of the grant; discouragement of caregivers from working, maladministration and fraudulent activities however not all claims have been proven to be true.

Conducting an evaluation on public policies is fundamental for ascertaining whether outcomes are acceptable or not, moreover, in evaluating the CSG policy critical considerations such as influences from the external environment should be made. Such considerations provide a greater perspective to the evaluation policy which helps generate rich feedback. There is not enough evaluation and reviews conducted on the CSG, the literature and studies that exist often mainly focus particularly on implementation and the impact thereof and the few studies that have been conducted are outdated.

Considering there is a significant number of children who should be receiving the grant but are not in receipt of it, vigorous action should be taken by the government in this regard. This can be done through a series of mass communication campaigns and research that would assist with tracking down those children and identify the reasons prohibiting access to the grant and sought solutions to assisting the potential beneficiaries. To deal with the current system that makes it possible for both the beneficiaries and SASSA officials to commit fraudulent activities, the government should invest in information and communications technology services that would make it easier to detect suspicious activities from as early as possible. Moreover, there should be stricter consequence management strategies to ensure people were discouraged from attempting to exploit the system.

Government, through the department of health should boost sex education in public spheres as well

as appropriate sexual and reproductive services in order for women and young girls to be empowered with the knowledge and only fall pregnant from their own choices and not a lack of such services. The CSG is used as one of government's numerous programmes to combat poverty; however, the most useful method of combating poverty is through ensuring that people have an income and that can only be achieved through creating employment opportunities including an environment that is conducive to entrepreneurship. Government should therefore aggressively focus its efforts in creating employment opportunities including conducting consultations with relevant stakeholders and promoting all types of skills.

Citizens should be empowered at the schooling age already in preparation for the working world; this should be done through the promotion of school subjects such as Entrepreneurships, Artisanship and Craftsmanship as well as Technology. Such subjects cultivate entrepreneurial skills and employability. All government departments and entities should be requested to conduct comprehensive policy reviews on their programmes every five years, the information generated from the reviews by the departments should be synchronised thus providing an opportunity for government to deal with matters and exploit opportunities holistically.

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