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Social protection in an aspiring 'developmental state': The political drivers of Ethiopia's PSNP

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Abstract

Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) is among the largest social protection programmes in Africa and has been promoted as a model for the continent. This paper analyses the political drivers of the programme, arguing that elite commitment can be understood in the context of shifts within Ethiopia's political settlement and the government's evolving development strategy. Foreign donors provided policy ideas and pushed for reform, but it was not until incentives flowing from the political settlement were favourable that elite commitment was secured. Even then, longstanding ideological commitments shaped the productive focus of the programme, ensuring consistency with the development strategy.

Keywords: Ethiopia, food security, social protection, public works, political settlements, process tracing

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1. Introduction

This paper analyses the political economy dynamics influencing the adoption and evolution of Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP). The PSNP, which began implementation in 2005, is one of the largest social protection programmes in Africa and has been widely promoted as a model for the rest of the continent. The PSNP reformed the existing humanitarian system as a means of addressing food insecurity. In contrast to the previous annual appeals system, the PSNP provides guaranteed support to chronically food-insecure households over the medium term, smoothing household consumption and protecting household assets from distress sales. Furthermore, the programme is intended to make a productive impact by using public works to build community infrastructure and through links to complementary programmes to build household assets (the Other Food Security Programmes – OFSP/Household Asset Building Programme – HABP). The PSNP has gradually expanded from an initial coverage of five million to a maximum of 10 million people from late 2015.

The 'adapted political settlements' framework guiding the paper is described in Lavers and Hickey (2016) and focuses on the interaction between transnational processes and the changing balance of interests and ideas within particular political settlements that provide shifting incentives for the introduction and expansion of social protection. To trace the PSNP policymaking process, the paper relies on semi-structured, key informant interviews with senior politicians and technical staff within government (11 interviews), representatives of donors and international organizations (26 interviews), foreign consultants (four interviews) and academics (one interview). These respondents constitute the majority of the key stakeholders, past and present, involved in design decisions and programme administration. These interviews were conducted during fieldwork in Ethiopia in 2009-10 and 2015-16 or by Skype with key people who had subsequently left the country.

Some existing research has discussed the process leading to the adoption of the PSNP (Cherrier 2014; Hickey *et al.* 2009; The IDL Group 2008; Wiseman *et al.* 2012). However, these studies have provided rather thin analyses of the political drivers of the programme, in particular regarding important political dynamics within the ruling coalition. This paper argues that elite commitment to the PSNP needs to be understood in the context of broader shifts within Ethiopia's political settlement and the government's evolving development strategy. In particular, the 2002-03 food crisis, coming on the back of a series of other shocks, was perceived as an existential crisis for the ruling coalition, prompting the incorporation of the PSNP into the existing rural development strategy. While foreign donors undoubtedly played an important role in providing many of the ideas in the PSNP and pushing government for reform, it was not until incentives flowing from the political settlement were favourable that elite commitment within government was secured. Even then, longstanding government ideological commitments were enormously influential in shaping the productive focus of the programme and ensuring consistency between

the PSNP and the broader development strategy. The extent to which this represents a broader commitment to social protection, however, remains an open question.

The paper proceeds in the next section to examine dynamics within the Ethiopian political settlement and how these have influenced an evolving development strategy. The subsequent sections trace policy debates on food security and social protection from the 1980s to the adoption of the PSNP in 2005, and then the evolution of the programme in the following 10 years. The final section concludes.

2. Ethiopia's shifting political settlements and development strategies under the EPRDF

The political settlement under the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) is characterised by extremely weak excluded elite factions, relatively cohesive intra-elite relations within the ruling coalition (especially in the period 2001-12) and a top-down, hierarchical system of governance that provides political elites substantial influence over lower-level factions.

2.1. Ruling party splits and the emergence of a 'developmental state'

The EPRDF came to power in 1991 after militarily defeating the Derg regime (1974-91). The EPRDF is a coalition of ethnic parties founded by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in the late 1980s as the TPLF shifted from a regional insurgency battling the Derg to one contesting national power. Although the EPRDF has been in power since 1991, perhaps the key shift in the political settlement was the 2001 TPLF split.

Though tensions initially concerned handling of the Ethio-Eritrean war (1998-2000), the subsequent split had far-reaching consequences. There had been a growing gap within the TPLF between Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in Addis Ababa and a dissident faction within the TPLF central committee in Tigray (Tadesse and Young 2003). In 2001 the ruling coalition fractured along this cleavage, with Meles' faction narrowly prevailing within the TPLF and, thanks in part to the support of the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), within the EPRDF as a whole (Milkias 2003; Tadesse and Young 2003). Shortly afterwards, the TPLF and regional parties that had supported the anti-Meles faction were subject to *tehadso* or renewal, purging their ranks of opposition supporters (Tadesse and Young 2003). In terms of the political settlement, the main result was the centralisation of power around Meles and, due to the expulsion of many in the left wing of the party, a greater degree of consistency in paradigmatic ideas that underpinned subsequent strategies (int. respondent EG2; Tadesse and Young 2003; Vaughan 2011).

The government published a set of sectoral strategies in 2001-02 to address the major challenges facing the country, all of which were written by or with the close involvement of Meles (int. respondent EG2) and formed a coherent approach. Furthermore, government was re-organised in 2001-02 with the creation of four 'super-ministries' that reflected key priorities, namely Rural Development,

Infrastructure, Federal Affairs and Capacity Building (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003). These strategies elaborated on the idea of Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI), originally set out in the 1993-94 economic strategy (TGE 1994). While little progress had been made in implementing ADLI to this point, following the 2001 split, there was consensus within the ruling coalition on these strategies and the need for rapid progress.

ADLI explicitly drew lessons from the experiences of Korea and Taiwan (MoFED 2003). The strategy aimed to raise smallholder agricultural productivity through labour-intensive production, extension services and the use of improved agricultural inputs, alongside the expansion of education and health as productive investments. In this way, ADLI would establish forward and backward production linkages between agriculture and an emerging industrial sector, enabling the gradual transition to an industrial economy. However, the aim was not just state-directed structural transformation, but also state control over population distribution. The government had long identified population growth as the 'single over-riding challenge' facing the country (TGE 1994: 8), leading to rural land shortages and urban migration despite the absence of sufficient employment opportunities. ADLI aimed to limit urban migration initially, only encouraging migration once industrial development created sufficient employment opportunities. The policy of state land ownership, in particular, was to encourage 'farmers to remain on their land, thereby avoiding unproductive and potentially harmful labor mobility', which would otherwise 'inevitably cause massive social problems and may even be detrimental to peace and stability' (MoFED 2003: 27).

ADLI was to stimulate a broad-based growth path, addressing poverty and food insecurity and obviating the need for specific forms of social protection,

'pro-poor growth outcome for Ethiopia would not be achieved through a collection of *ad hoc* and targeted programs of the "safety net" variety. A pro-poor outcome results from a pro-poor *strategy*' (MoFED 2002: 28).

This minimalist approach to social protection is consistent with the 1996 Developmental Social Welfare Policy (DSWP), the main precedent for subsequent social protection debates. The DSWP is noteworthy, first, because of the early framing of social interventions as productive rather than merely protective, requiring that everyone receiving support should contribute their labour to development projects (MoLSA 1996). This 'productivist'¹ orientation to social policy was evident ever since the TPLF struggle and continues to the present. Second, the policy is clear that primary responsibility for welfare lies with communities, with the state limited to coordinating and supporting local initiatives. Though not discussed in the DSWP, the government argued elsewhere that the principal form of state social

¹ 'Productivist' social policy in the East Asian developmental states prioritised education and health as productive investments, as well as employment-based social insurance that provided resources for state investment. While the EPRDF has tended to employ different policy instruments, it shares the goal of combining protective and productive objectives.

protection to the rural population was actually the distribution of usufruct rights to state-owned land. From this perspective state land ownership, which protects smallholders from displacement by market forces, constitutes 'the only social security the peasants have' (Meles cited in Marcus 1995).

The developmental orientation of the post-2001 EPRDF therefore stems from multiple ideational and structural factors. The leadership continued to be influenced by the TPLF's Maoist strategy employed in its fight against the Derg, in which it gained the support of the peasantry through a combination of ethno-nationalism and the delivery of services (Berhe 2008; Vaughan 2011; Young 1997). As the EPRDF is widely perceived to be dominated by the Tigrayan ethnic minority that constitutes just 6 percent of the population, the EPRDF has sought to build its legitimacy by delivering rapid socioeconomic progress (Hagmann and Abbink 2011; Vaughan 2003) and through the institutionalisation of ethnic federalism – which in principle provides self-determination for Ethiopia's 'nations, nationalities and peoples'. Furthermore, following the Eritrean war and the 2001 split, the government faced further crises, with riots in Addis Ababa in 2001, and a severe drought and food crisis in 2002-03. For Meles and other leading figures, these events constituted a series of 'Armageddons', threatening the ruling coalition and even the existence of the country (int. respondent EG2; Simon 2011). The 2002 Foreign Policy identifies the 'national humiliation and shame' of 'poverty and backwardness' as the principal threat to national security, and rapid development as the necessary response (MoI 2002: 10–12).

2.2. The 2005 elections

The 2005 election campaign was widely recognised as the most open and competitive in Ethiopian history. Shortly before election day, however, the EPRDF, fearing defeat, limited opposition space and mobilised the party-state to get out the vote. The EPRDF completely misjudged the mood in the country, expecting to win easily, and was surprised by the popularity and coherence of opposition parties (Lefort 2007; Vaughan 2011). Street protests against the results in the following months were forcibly suppressed, with several hundred protestors killed and the leadership of the main opposition party arrested.

The government's responses to the electoral crisis were twofold. First, as widely discussed, political space reduced dramatically, with attempts to divide opposition parties and restrict activities of media and civil society (Aalen and Tronvoll 2009). Second, however, there was a concerted attempt to address sources of discontent and win back opposition supporters (Simon 2011; Vaughan 2011). This involved a massive recruitment of kebele (sub-district) administrators and expansion of sub-kebele structures that reached down to the household level, serving dual functions of policy implementation and political mobilisation (Vaughan 2011).

The EPRDF's loss of every seat in Addis Ababa in 2005, and the post-election violence, reinforced government concerns about urban unemployment. Arguably, this

was just the 'social explosion' Meles had talked about when expressing concerns about urban migration, and it constituted 'another Armageddon' for the leadership (int respondent EG2). As well as reinforcing long-held concerns about the need to limit rural-urban migration, the government launched new initiatives to develop micro and small enterprises (MSEs) to address urban unemployment (Di Nunzio 2014). Subsequent elections have been all but an irrelevance, with the EPRDF and affiliates sweeping national and local elections since 2005.

2.3. The EPRDF after Meles

The unexpected death of Meles Zenawi in 2012 prompted a re-alignment within the ruling coalition. The new prime minister, Hailemariam Desalegn, who originates from Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) – the weakest of the four main regions – and belongs to a minority protestant denomination, lacks the authority of his predecessor. His selection as prime minister constitutes something of a compromise between the TPLF – still the most powerful of the EPRDF parties, but declining in influence – the ANDM and Oromiya People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), which are increasingly assertive both before Meles' death and, in particular, afterwards. The current trajectory of the ruling coalition is one of weakening central control and growing fragmentation (Lefort 2014).

Initially, elite consensus was reached by 'sticking to the path' laid down by Meles (Desalegn 2012: 1–2). However, serious questions remain about the ruling coalition's capacity to address emerging existential threats. First is the unresolved question of how to provide employment for the growing population of young adults with few prospects for agricultural livelihoods. Second, late 2014 and, in particular, 2015-16 have seen unprecedented anti-government protests across small towns and cities in Oromiya. The flashpoint was the Addis Ababa Masterplan that sought to extend the capital's boundaries into surrounding Oromiya, but for the government, protests are directly related to unemployment. While this is undoubtedly a contributing factor, growing Oromo nationalism – not least the result of ethnic federalism which has emphasised ethnic identity – has also been a key factor mobilising protestors. Third, another food crisis in 2015-16 sparked by the most severe El Niño since 1984-85 has left some 18 million people requiring urgent support to avert famine. While the PSNP has proven an essential delivery mechanism, the crisis threatens the EPRDF's narrative of delivering rapid development and underscores the limited progress in addressing the root causes of food insecurity.

2.4. Complex role of donors in Ethiopia's political settlement

The government continues to rely heavily on foreign aid, which has constituted more than a third of the government budget in recent years (Feyissa 2011). Ethiopia's donors therefore play an important role in sustaining, but also periodically challenging, the political settlement. Ever since coming to power, the government has been determined to retain autonomy over decision making (Feyissa 2011; Furtado and Smith 2009). In part this stems from national pride in being 'the only Africa state that was never colonized', as is often argued (Furtado and Smith 2009). However,

equally influential is the ruling coalition's commitment to a clear development agenda of its own, alongside a conviction that donor priorities shift and, as Meles argued, are frequently wrong (Zenawi 2006).

The government has consistently demonstrated itself willing to forgo aid rather than change policies, notably in stand-offs with the IFIs in the early 1990s and budget support donors following the 2005 elections (Feyissa 2011). The government regards donors as unreliable and relations are often problematic. The partial exception here was the World Bank in the early 2000s. To some degree this may be the result of the Bank's continued support when other donors pulled out over the Eritrean war (Furtado and Smith 2009). However, the Bank's country director in the early 2000s was unusually close to Meles (ints. respondents ED9, ED21), while Meles was involved in several policy dialogues with former Bank Chief Economist, Joseph Stiglitz.

3. Securing elite commitment to the PSNP

This section analyses the process leading to the adoption of the PSNP in 2005, considering: first, food security policy up to the 2002-03 food crisis; and, second, discussions within the New Coalition for Food Security.

3.1. Emergence of a dysfunctional emergency system

Food insecurity and famine have a long history in Ethiopia. Famines in 1973 and 1984-85 forced the Imperial and Derg governments, respectively, to accept a role for NGOs and international organisations in delivering relief (Rahmato 2002), as well as making food security a central focus of government policy. In doing so, these crises helped construct the humanitarian machinery onto which the PSNP would subsequently build.

The 1984-85 famine was also a defining moment for the TPLF. The epicentre of the famine was in Tigray and neighbouring Wollo, not least due to the Derg's use of food as a weapon of war; destroying crops, denying food aid and forcibly resettling people from Tigray (De Waal 1997; Milas and Latif 2000). As a movement whose existence depended upon the support of the peasantry, addressing the famine was essential to the TPLF struggle (Milas and Latif 2000; Young 1997). The TPLF deployed its humanitarian arm, the Relief Society of Tigray (REST), to distribute food to the local population, including an early attempt to use food aid to engage recipients in agricultural and environmental rehabilitation programmes (Salih 2013) and, in desperation, organised the temporary evacuation of large numbers of people to Sudan. While there have been vigorous subsequent debates about how to frame the food insecurity problem and how it should be addressed, there can be little doubt about the TPLF/EPRDF commitment to addressing the problem. Indeed, on seizing control of Addis Ababa in 1991, Meles, in one of his first public statements, famously said that he would 'consider his government a success if Ethiopians were able to eat three meals a day' (Meles Zenawi Foundation 2012).

Among the EPRDF's first initiatives in government was the National Policy on Disaster Prevention and Management in 1993. This policy was notable for being the first concerted attempt to link emergency relief to developmental objectives. All relief to able-bodied people was to be provided through employment generation schemes (EGS), while 'gratuitous relief' without work requirements would only be available to those who could not work and had nobody to support them (TGE 1993). EGS built directly on REST's experience during the struggle, extending the relief model employed in Tigray (int. respondent ED7; Salih 2013), and also drew on a government study tour to Maharashtra's employment guarantee scheme (Middlebrook 2003). The attractiveness of EGS to the government was the potential to mobilise food aid to achieve development objectives (Maxwell 1993). Specifically, EGS met the needs of many *wereda* (district) administrations, which lacked a budget to implement ambitious development plans (int. respondent ED7) and reflected the productivist paradigmatic commitment that persists to the present,

'Humanitarian people would say – you can't ask someone who is starving to dig holes, but the government said, yes of course, they must do something' (int. respondent EC4).

Despite the government's ambitions, local government capacity to organise public works was limited and most recipients continued to receive unconditional aid. The emergency system continued to be highly fragmented, with a range of largely uncoordinated programmes operated by donors, NGOs and government.

From the early 1990s there was a growing acknowledgement that food insecurity was a chronic problem – the same people required assistance every year – and as such, the annual appeals system was inappropriate (Maxwell 1993). Furthermore, many features of the PSNP – cash instead of food and predictable rather than ad hoc support – were proposed years beforehand (Devereux 2000; Maxwell 1993). The initiative for reform intensified from about 2000. Many donor respondents point to the catalysing role played by Jo Raison, a consultant for USAID, the EC and DFID. Raison's paper built on previous assessments of the emergency system, arguing that the existing appeals system was saving lives, but failing to protect household assets, with the result that households were becoming increasingly poor and unable to cope with shocks (Raison 2001). The recommendation was to provide medium-term support to protect and build household assets.

Partly based on this work, USAID funded Save the Children UK to implement the Relief to Development (R2D) programme from 2001, which took two *wereda* out of the emergency system, providing predictable and guaranteed support to households for three years based on a work requirement. Bound by USAID's mandate, the programme provided support in kind. However, from 2003 Save the Children piloted a similar approach using cash transfers. Distinct from these initiatives, the WFP also reformed its enormous 'project 2488' food aid programme into Meret in 1999. Meret's aim was to use food aid for developmental purposes, especially watershed management and afforestation projects.

The government, meanwhile, announced its Rural Development Strategy and a new Food Security Strategy (FSS) in 2002, shortly following the 2001 split. The FSS was described by one of its authors as 'a subset of ADLI' (int. respondent EG4) and, accordingly, the main thrust of the FSS was to raise agricultural productivity through increased use of improved agricultural inputs. The expectation was that raising agricultural productivity would limit migration (int. respondent EG2), while an 'access to land' or resettlement programme would relieve some of the population pressure by resettling people to sparsely populated western lowlands. In contrast to the Derg's resettlement programme, this was intended to be voluntary as well as intra-regional, to limit inter-ethnic tensions between resettled and host populations. Alongside these priorities, the FSS acknowledged that for the foreseeable future EGS and other targeted schemes were essential for those unable to meet their own needs.

Respondents report that the donor reaction to ADLI was 'ridicule' and 'guffawing' (ints. respondents ED1, ED13). In part this might be explained by the legacy of the structural adjustment era and the overwhelming focus of the development industry at the time on poverty reduction rather than growth. A development strategy which explicitly promoted state intervention in agriculture and industrialisation was not, at that time, in fashion. It may also have been just a leap too far for many from the common view of Ethiopia as a 'basket-case' to the government's attempt to model itself on the developmental states of Korea and Taiwan. However, donor intransigence caused serious friction with the government (ints. respondents ED1, ED21). This was a source of particular frustration for Meles, who wanted to discuss agricultural growth and economic development, which he saw as the only possible solutions to food insecurity, while all the donors were focused on current emergencies (int. respondent ED1). Ultimately, the government proceeded regardless, implementing the Rural Development Strategy and FSS, to the extent possible, with its own resources, while donors financed the emergency system.

3.2. The 2002-03 food crisis and the New Coalition for Food Security

A defining moment for both government and donors was the severe drought in 2002 and resulting food crisis in 2003, during which some 13-14 million people required support. In terms of the immediate response, the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Commission (DPPC) mobilised donors and organised field trips to affected areas, leading to a common view that the government was intent on ensuring that 'they wouldn't make the mistake of 1984 and 1974' (int. respondent ED8).

USAID and DFID called a meeting in early 2003 that brought together the main donors involved in food security. Their aim was to forge a common position and put together a pot of money that could be used to entice government (int. respondent ED6, ED9). Policy options were discussed, including proposals for a medium-term programme. The government was excluded, since the government had previously been highly effective in playing donors off against one another. Following donor discussions, the World Bank country director held a series of discussions with the

prime minister. Several respondents point to the relatively close relations between the World Bank and the government at that time as vital to moving the debate on (ints. respondents ED6, ED13, ED21).

The result was the launch of the New Coalition for Food Security (NCFS), bringing together federal and regional governments and donors at an inaugural meeting in June 2003. Meles led the meeting, arguing that food security had become a question of national security, posing a threat to the existence of the country. Donor representatives, meanwhile, made statements one after another expressing their support for a safety net (int. respondent ED1). The initial meeting established working groups comprising government and donor technical experts to draft the NCFS report.

While the NCFS is widely accepted as the key event leading to the PSNP, the debate was much broader than a safety net, covering the whole agricultural and food security strategy. Indeed, the rather vague discussion of a safety net in the final report warrants just three pages out of 120 (NCFS 2003). Resettlement resurfaced as a major source of tension in the NCFS, to the point at which 'it almost caused a complete breakdown of the conversation on the safety net' (int. respondent ED21). The government organised helicopter tours for ambassadors to visit resettlement sites (ints. respondents EG2, EG4, ED1, ED13, ED25).² Understandably, perhaps, given the deeply problematic history of forced resettlement, donors were unwilling to get involved. The compromise struck was to include a discussion of resettlement in a separate volume of the NCFS report.

The safety net ultimately emerged as a key area of consensus at the November conference to launch the report. The detailed PSNP design phase took place from the end of 2003 and exposed significant divisions between government and different donors regarding the form that the programme should take. Consequently, the donor consensus that had convinced the government to launch the NCFS unravelled and discussions became increasingly fractious. There were four main fault-lines.

The first concerned public works. For the government there was no question that the PSNP should be 'productive', with no able-bodied person receiving support without working. While the World Bank, USAID and WFP were all broadly supportive, DFID, the EC and Irish Aid all pushed to ensure that there would be direct support for those that were unable to participate in public works (int. respondent ED6). A key feature of the subsequent memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the government and donors on the PSNP regarded the 'primacy of transfers' (Wiseman *et al.* 2012: 137), stipulating that, although most people were expected to work for support, participants' entitlement to transfers should not depend on the government's capacity to organise public works.

² Indeed, it seems probable that government involvement in the NCFS was motivated, in part, by a desire to secure donor finance for resettlement.

The second dividing line regarded the switch from food to cash. USAID and WFP mandates at that time prevented them from providing support in cash. However, respondents noted that while USAID 'bent over backwards to be a flexible participant,' despite the constraints of US law (int. respondent ED8), WFP campaigned against the switch (ints. respondents ED1, ED8). In contrast, the World Bank, DFID and the EC were all enthusiastic about cash transfers. Though initially sceptical about creating entitlements to cash, key people in government ultimately became enthusiastic supporters (int. respondent ED1). The final agreement was for a mixed approach involving cash and food transfers, to which all donors could contribute, but a 'cash first principle' in the MoU, except in areas where market conditions were not suitable.

The third issue concerned the budget and financial contributions. Some donors, including DFID, wanted the PSNP to be integrated into the government budget. However, the government was concerned this would leave it responsible for any funding shortfall (int. respondent ED3). Ultimately, government fears aligned with USAID and World Bank concerns about the need for special reporting requirements, with the result that the programme was off-budget. As part of these discussions, donors also pushed the government to contribute financially to the programme. However, the government refused, arguing that it would make a significant contribution in the costs of labour, infrastructure and materials by implementing the programme through government structures (int. respondent ED14).

The final tension regarded the roll-out. Donors, who were cautious about the high stakes involved, favoured piloting and gradual expansion. In contrast, now that the government was committed to the PSNP, it wanted to launch the project at full scale, covering five million people. This reflects a common pattern, in which approval of political elites takes a long time to secure, but, once achieved, policies are implemented according to an extremely ambitious timetable. Despite donor reservations, the programme was indeed launched at scale in early 2005.

3.3. Explaining elite commitment to the PSNP

It is clear from the previous discussion that donors played a key role in pushing the safety net onto the government's agenda. However, it would be misguided to view this as a donor-driven process. Respondents were unanimous in arguing that nothing in Ethiopia happens without the government's support and certainly not a programme the size of the PSNP. In the words of one senior donor official, 'you don't tell Ethiopians anything, you make suggestions' (int. respondent ED9).

The involvement of key figures within the ruling coalition throughout detailed discussions is a clear sign of the high political priority assigned to the PSNP. The deputy prime minister, Addisu Legesse, was briefed on a daily basis (int. respondent EG4), while Addisu reported that Meles himself 'was involved on a day to day basis ... We would talk directly, then we worked out the policies and went back to him to discuss' (int. respondent EG2). Furthermore, the PSNP was situated within the newly

created Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD), one of the most important ministries tasked with central components of the development strategy.

There are a number of reasons why the government embraced the PSNP. First, there is a longstanding ideological commitment within the ruling party to improving the condition of the peasantry and addressing food insecurity. Several respondents who closely interacted with Meles during this period were clear that this was an issue that was 'close to his heart' (int. respondent ED13). What the 2003 food crisis and NCFS discussions did, however, was to shift the government's problem framing from one primarily focused on raising agricultural productivity to a more balanced concern with the stabilisation of household consumption and assets, providing a base for productivity improvements. This shift in framing opened up space to the policy idea of the PSNP.

Second, the 2003 crisis was so influential because of the context within which it occurred. It came on the back of the Eritrean war, the TPLF split and urban protests in 2001. The leadership was also well aware that famines in 1973 and 1984-85 directly contributed to the downfall of previous regimes. The 2003 crisis was, therefore, interpreted as the latest in a series of 'Armageddons' that posed an existential threat to the ruling coalition. This was a crisis of the prevailing distributional regime. The government had pursued a broad-based development strategy that would benefit everyone, obviating the need for specific social protection policies or indeed food security interventions. Furthermore, this strategy was intended as a means of managing the process of urbanisation and structural transformation in the interests of social and political stability. What actually transpired, however, in the context of rapid population growth and stagnant agricultural productivity, were increasingly severe land shortages and a large rural population that was either unable to feed itself or which was extremely vulnerable to shocks. Such a disastrous outcome had been discussed by Meles just a few years previously and demanded a response,

In the nightmare scenario case, what we would have is agricultural productivity and non-farming employment would not increase significantly. New mouths to feed will obviously crop up in the rural areas in big numbers. They will have no access to non-farming employment because it is not being created in enough numbers' (Meles, cited in The Reporter 2000).

Third, the PSNP was not adopted as a standalone policy. The government insisted that the PSNP had to be an integral part of the FSS and, therefore, ADLI (int. respondent ED1). In principle at least, this was a coherent strategy for raising agricultural productivity, addressing land shortages and thereby tackling both the food insecurity problem and the political problem of growing landlessness. As such, it is not an accident that the PSNP differs from donor-promoted social cash transfer (SCT) programmes in many other African countries. The government was exposed to the SCT model, but explicitly rejected it because it did not meet the government's

productivist requirements and it was thought likely to foster dependency (int. respondent EG2). The link between the PSNP and credit and extension services, meanwhile, has come to be seen as an integral part of the 'PSNP model' that has been promoted across Africa (Slater and McCord 2013). From the government's perspective, therefore, the party split and the ideological consistency that it brought were just as important to the PSNP as it had been for the broader development strategy. According to the deputy prime minister,

'the renewal was essential. Before we [the government] didn't have the same ideas on development, about how to go forward. But the drought came after, at a time when everyone talks the same language. We had a clear strategy and that accelerated the problem solving' (int. respondent EG2).

Nevertheless, the adoption of the PSNP should not be read as a commitment to social protection more broadly. The government saw the PSNP as a short-term stop-gap (int. respondent EG2, EG4), while rapid economic development remained the only solution to food insecurity. In the words of a government member of the design team, the role of the PSNP was 'to ameliorate and to keep things calm as this policy direction is being implemented' (int. respondent EG4). The antipathy towards western-style welfare provision remained, with the result that the phrases 'social protection' and 'social assistance' were purposefully avoided by government (int. respondent EG10) and were absent from the original PSNP documentation³ and the 2005 development strategy.

Fourth, recurrent food crises were not just a threat to domestic legitimacy, but were also a source of 'painful national disgrace' (Mol 2002: 10) and, specifically, embarrassment to the government internationally. This was particularly so for Prime Minister Meles, who was playing an increasingly prominent role regionally and globally, with recurrent food crises threatening to undermine his credibility (ints. respondents ED1, ED2, EC3).

Fifth, a sole focus on financing as an indicator of elite commitment is misleading. The government has long been recognised to be rather astute at mobilising donor resources for shared objectives, enabling the government to switch its own resources to priorities that donors are unwilling to support (Furtado and Smith 2009). In the words of one government respondent, 'we try to use the donors first' (int. respondent EG5), maximising the government's freedom to allocate resources. Prior to the PSNP, the government relied on donors to finance emergency relief, which in turn enabled the government to focus its own resources on the FSS. This pattern continued with the PSNP (int. respondent ED18, EC1). For example, the World Bank estimated PSNP costs at approximately \$170m a year. However, the same document notes that government contributions to food security as a whole were

³ The only mention was that PSNP participants should not have access to 'other means of social protection' (MoARD 2004: 4)

\$233m for 2004-05 (World Bank 2004). By refusing to finance the PSNP, all this government money was available for the OFSP and resettlement.

Sixth, the PSNP was explicitly intended as a means of forcing NGOs to align with government plans (ints. respondents EG4, ED6). Government hostility towards NGOs has a long history that goes back to its original ideas about 'revolutionary democracy', which leaves no space for independent civil society as a counterbalance to the state (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003). NGOs, despite playing an important role in the emergency system, were excluded from the NCFS (int. respondent ED8)⁴ and, in the case of USAID-funded NGOs, effectively became implementers for a government programme.

Finally, the PSNP was enabled by ambitious fiscal and administrative decentralisation efforts to build the capacity of *wereda* administrations launched in the wake of the 2001 split (Vaughan 2011; Vaughan and Rafanell 2012). While in itself decentralisation was perhaps not a main cause of the PSNP, it would have been very difficult to launch the PSNP without this prior investment in state capacity.

There are therefore a range of reasons for government commitment to the PSNP. However, contrary to existing analyses (Cherrier 2014; The IDL Group 2008; Wiseman *et al.* 2012), the research found no evidence that the 2005 elections, which took place four months after the PSNP launch, were a factor. None of my respondents from government or donor organisations mentioned the elections, while many explicitly dismissed any influence they may have had. The discussions leading to the PSNP were initiated long before the elections, while the academic literature concludes that the government was convinced it would win until the very last moment in May 2005 (Lefort 2007; Vaughan 2011). Beyond timing, there is therefore no evidence to suggest that electoral politics contributed to elite commitment to the programme.

While domestic politics were vital, the PSNP would not have been possible without strong commitment from donors. While DFID and the World Bank have subsequently promoted the PSNP as a model of social protection, it is notable that the PSNP design process was, for the most part, not linked to transnational attempts to promote social protection. Despite the launch of a World Bank social protection strategy in previous years, at the country level the World Bank did not initially see the PSNP as part of social protection programming (int. respondent ED13, ED14). Similarly, one respondent argued that the DFID country officer deliberately kept DFID headquarters out of discussions, given that by 2004 DFID was strongly pushing social cash transfers and this was likely to complicate negotiations (int. respondent ED1). Indeed, at this early stage of the debate on social protection in development, many donor representatives in Ethiopia were simply not aware of comparable programmes in other countries, with one leading figure admitting that 'I was completely clueless about wider debates on social protection' (int. respondent ED1).

⁴ With the exception of REST, the relief arm of the TPLF.

4. From a temporary safety net to a social protection system?

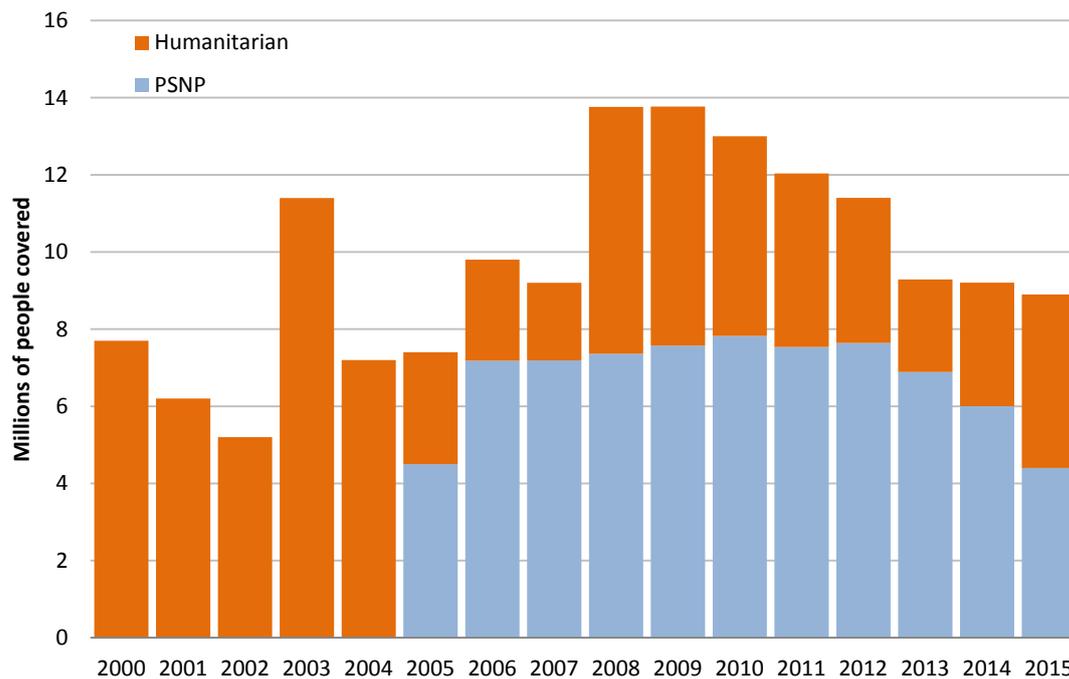
The process leading to the adoption of the PSNP was long and sometimes fraught. However, by the time implementation began there was strong government commitment to the programme and the bureaucracy was mobilised in its implementation. Since 2005, the PSNP has evolved. Arguably, phase four, which began in 2015, is the most significant departure, with the PSNP now envisaged as the centrepiece of a social protection system that will also comprise a new urban safety net (UPSNP) from 2016. For many donors, this process constitutes a significant shift in government's thinking. While possible, there are good reasons for caution in interpreting these changes in policy and discourse.

4.1. Beyond a stop gap: implementation and expansion

Bi-annual independent evaluations of the PSNP have consistently found that targeting in the highland regions closely follows the programme guidelines and effectively targets households that are poorer and more food insecure (Hoddinott *et al.* 2015). In sharp contrast, a 2010 Human Rights Watch report claimed that the government systematically uses the PSNP to punish individuals and districts that support opposition parties by excluding them from support (HRW 2010). It is not possible to rule out such political manipulation of the programme. However, detailed qualitative studies of PSNP implementation have found that variation in the targeting approach initially used in different localities was the result of contrasting interpretation of programme guidelines by local government officials and over-enthusiastic attempts to meet centrally determined targets on graduation, rather than political capture (Bishop and Hilhorst 2010; Lavers 2013). There is a clear contrast in this respect between the highland regions and the lowland regions of Afar and Somali to which the PSNP was extended in the 2006 expansion (Figure 1). In these areas, where the state has long had a much more limited presence, the Ministry of Agriculture's (MoA's) own documentation acknowledges that, 'Access to PSNP transfers in Afar and Somali is in effect not targeted' (MoA 2014: 13), largely as a result of the involvement of clan leaders in selecting participants (Hoddinott *et al.* 2015).

Despite the government's intention of graduating all PSNP participants within five years, only 500,000 of the more than 7 million participants were in fact graduated by 2010. Accordingly, both donors and government recognised the achievements of the programme and that there was no viable alternative to it; a new five-year phase was agreed. However, this extension still fell short of anything approaching a long-term commitment to social protection from the government. The 2010 development strategy, the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP), again omitted the term 'social protection'. Moreover, the GTP set the target of reducing PSNP enrolment from 7 million to 1.3 million by 2015 (MoFED 2010: 48), essentially graduating all able-bodied participants, leaving just those on direct support.

Figure 1: Coverage of food security programmes



Source: Author's illustration based on DFID staff calculations and MoA data. Figures for 2015 based on int. respondent EG3 (PSNP) and ReliefWeb (humanitarian).

Figure 1 shows little progress in graduation up to 2012, with PSNP enrolment steady at 7-8 million. Since 2012, however, there has been rapid and accelerating graduation, with enrolment falling to 4.4 million by the end of 2014-15 (int. respondent EG3). The key driver would appear to be the GTP target. With this national target in mind, performance targets for local government officials – including wereda administrators, kebele managers and development agents – have included specific graduation targets (int. respondent EG4; Dagnachew Siyoum 2013; Hoddinott *et al.* 2015). Furthermore, GTP targets led some within government to anticipate that the PSNP would end in 2015. Consequently, some regional administrations pressurised lower-level administrations to graduate participants,

'Even up to the final design process [for PSNP4], some regions thought that it would end, so they set quotas for local government and made a strong push for graduation ... they [wereda administrators] were told that they had to graduate 60 percent of the caseload in 2015 ... There were quotas set from the region to the wereda to meet political targets' (int. respondent EG10).

As such, while strong state capacity and top-down control mechanisms have, arguably, limited possibilities for political capture of the PSNP, this does not necessarily result in effective implementation of social protection. In particular, a system of assessment based on performance scorecards for government officials provides strong incentives for implementation, regardless of the suitability of policies in a particular local context (Lavers 2013). Furthermore, the common practice of

setting hugely ambitious targets at national level translates into equally ambitious targets for local government officials.

4.2. PSNP at the centre of a social protection system

The PSNP did not end in 2015, but instead underwent a far-reaching and potentially significant re-design for PSNP4 (2015-19) alongside drafting of the National Social Protection Policy (NSPP). The prime minister delegated responsibility to the minister of labour and social affairs, who established a Social Protection Platform, consisting of relevant government ministries, donors and even NGOs, with support from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), UNICEF and the World Bank (int. respondent ED10, ED11). The NSPP process was a long one; discussions began in 2010, with a first draft submitted to the Council of Ministers in 2012, but the policy was only approved in late 2014.⁵

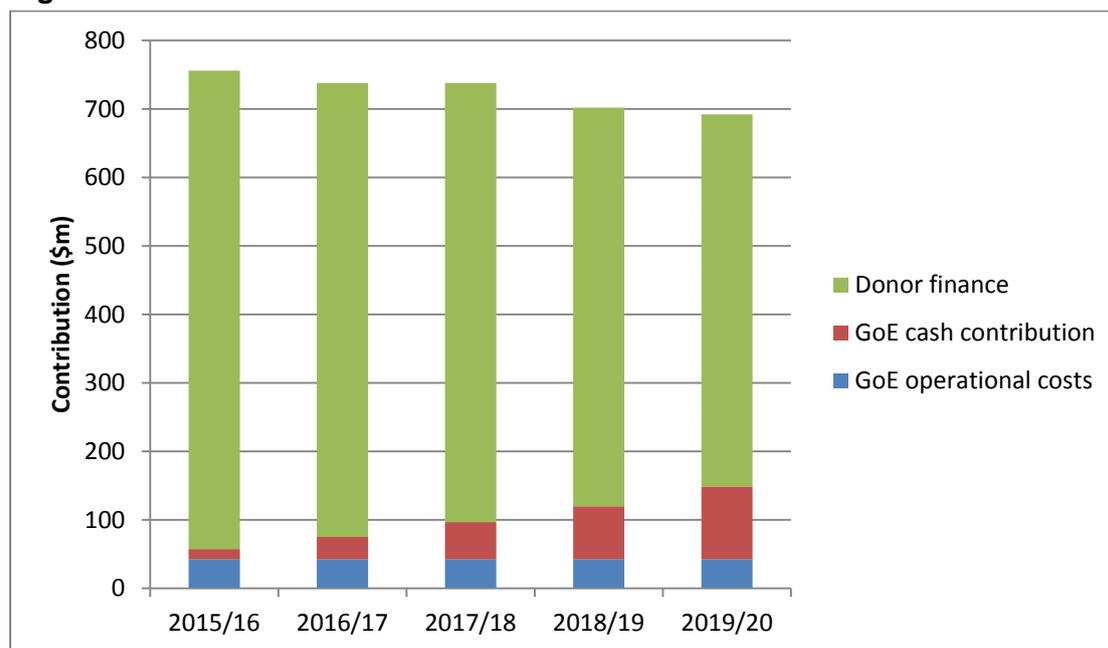
The NSPP and the related Social Protection Strategy bring together a range of existing and recent initiatives, including: the PSNP – now unequivocally framed as a social protection programme; a new Urban PSNP (see below); a private sector pension scheme launched in 2011; and health insurance schemes for formal and informal sectors (Lavers Under review). Each of these programmes has a longer history than the NSPP itself and, consequently, the NSPP is an attempt to coordinate existing initiatives, rather than a major driver of policy itself.

Arguably the most significant change in PSNP4 is that the government has made significant financial commitments to the programme. This cash contribution constitutes roughly 8 percent of the five-year costs, in addition to operational contributions (Figure 2). Donor respondents report that this is part of a shared understanding that the government will progressively move towards solely domestic financing over the next 10 years (ints. respondents ED5, ED16, ED23). There is no clear timetable for this, however. This financial commitment came about through sustained pressure from donors since 2012, including meetings between heads of donor agencies and the minister of agriculture and deputy prime minister (int. respondents ED18). Several PSNP donors made it clear that they were unwilling to fund the programme indefinitely and that the government had to start sharing the burden (ints. respondents ED5, ED18, ED23).

Beyond financing, PSNP4 involves several design changes apparently indicating a shift in problem framing within government away from a short-term stop-gap towards an integrated social protection system. First, the PSNP will gradually be scaled up from a geographically targeted programme to a national safety net. The aim is to maintain coverage of up to 10 million people, with new participants entering the programme as existing participants graduate. For some donors, this signifies the gradual acceptance by government that the PSNP will transform into a permanent institution (int. respondent ED8). Second, PSNP4 implementation will involve a

⁵ It is likely that part of the delay was linked to the death of the prime minister in 2012 and subsequent upheaval within the ruling coalition.

Figure 2: Financial commitments to the PSNP4



Source: Author's illustration based on World Bank (2014: 183)

broader range of government actors and attempts to link the PSNP to new Disaster Risk Management, Nutrition and Green Economy Policies. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), now responsible for the NSPP, will oversee this coordination and will be directly responsible for administering the direct support component of the PSNP.

4.3. Taking the PSNP model to the cities

Another significant development is the agreement between the government and the World Bank to implement an Urban PSNP (USPNP) from April 2016. The government has been keen to establish an urban safety net for many years, with initial discussions during the global food crisis in 2008, when the government ultimately launched a food subsidy programme instead (int. respondent ED16), and another approach from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED) to the Bank in 2010-11 (ints. respondents ED18, ED20), around the time that the government introduced short-lived price caps on consumer goods (Maasho 2011). Little progress was made, however, until the minister of finance again approached the World Bank in 2014 (ints. respondents ED17, ED20).

The government has taken the unusual step of committing \$150 million in advance to the five-year cost of \$530 million and the World Bank has committed \$300 million (int. respondent ED17; World Bank 2015). While this leaves a funding gap, for the time being the government has declined to bring other donors into negotiations, preferring to design the programme with the World Bank alone to simplify the process, before seeking additional funds once the programme has been established (ints. respondents EG9, ED17, ED20). The World Bank and at least some people within government hope the UPSNP will lead to the withdrawal of government food

subsidies (int. respondent EG9, ED20) that have grown to some \$500m in recent years (DFID 2015: 4).

The UPSNP is managed by an implementing agency in the Ministry of Urban Development, Housing and Construction (MoUDHC). The design process involved two MoA experts assigned to the MoUDHC (int. respondent EG9), and sticks to a similar model to the PSNP, with public works for able-bodied participants and direct support for those that cannot work. As with the PSNP, the programme is intended to be both protective and productive, offering a pathway to graduation. Indeed, during the design process, MoFED explicitly rejected a World Bank recommendation of a conditional cash transfer programme (int. respondent ED20). Instead, the UPSNP builds on existing MSE credit programmes (int. respondent EG9); however, there is an acknowledgement that poor individuals included in the UPSNP will not initially be ready for credit (int. respondent EG9). Instead, participants will receive training over three years and a livelihood grant in the third year to enable them to set up their own business (int. respondent EG9, ED17). The government's aim is to graduate 80 per cent of participants within three years (int. respondent EG9), despite the failure of the rural programme to achieve anything like this rate.

The UPSNP will initially cover 600,000 people in 11 regional capitals. However, MoUDHC has much bigger plans, hoping to expand over 10 years to cover 4.7 million people – all those below the urban poverty line – in 972 towns and cities with a population greater than 2,000 (int. respondent EG9). This enlarged proposal does not yet have the support of MoFED or the Prime Minister's Office. However, the hope within MoUDHC is that the removal of food subsidies will free up resources for UPSNP expansion (int. respondent EG9).

The government's clear commitment to the UPSNP can be traced to urban protests in 2005 and 2001, food price inflation from 2008 and longstanding concerns about the impact of urban migration and unemployment,

'there is a huge explosion of youngsters with no options in rural areas. There is no more land to distribute, they either depend on the meagre resources of their family or they migrate – hundreds of thousands of youngsters. That is why the UPSNP was borne. Otherwise it might lead to political instability which the government is keeping an eye on' (int. respondent EG9).

The UPSNP represents an acknowledgement that direct measures to address urban poverty and unemployment are essential to deal with the growing threat to the ruling coalition. However, the proposed expansion is also explicitly framed as a means of limiting further urban migration by providing support to people in small towns across the country,

'The aim is to minimise migration to the big cities, and so the plan is to expand to more small cities with social problems. It [migration] would be a

disaster and would bring social and political unrest' (int. respondent EG9).

The wave of protests in small towns across Oromiya in 2015-16 has resulted in urgency within government to identify policies that can address unemployment. The UPSNP would appear well placed, given the close fit with the ruling coalition's ideology.

4.4. Towards a faltering commitment to social protection?

At this early stage, it is very difficult to interpret the adoption of the NSPP and the PSNP re-design. There are indications that there has been a significant shift in government thinking. Certainly, many donors argue that the government, which aspires to middle-income country status, has recognised the importance of social protection in the likes of Brazil and South Africa, acknowledging that social protection systems are a positive feature of state provision, rather than a sign of government failure (ints. respondents ED19, ED23). Indeed, it may well be that, given the rapid growth achieved and the evolution of the government development strategy in the last decade, social protection now fits government objectives in a way that it did not 10 years ago.

Furthermore, there are signs that the government's concerns about welfare dependency have reduced (int. respondent ED18, ED25, EC1). In the words of one long-term consultant to the government,

'for a long time social protection couldn't be discussed, it was seen as a welfare system of the west. But gradually they realised that growth and social protection couldn't be separated. Also there was the PSNP experience, this influenced them' (int. respondent EC4).

At the same time, however, there are also good reasons for caution. Notably, the close involvement of the most senior government figures in the design of the PSNP and CBHI that provided a clear indication of their political importance (Lavers Under review), is absent in the case of the NSPP, even prior to Meles' death. Such an apparently far-reaching initiative was delegated to MoLSA, a marginal ministry that is widely accepted to have extremely limited technical capacity. Meanwhile, the process leading to the NSPP was exceptionally inclusive, involving donors and NGOs. This is in sharp contrast to the national development strategy, which the National Planning Commission drafted behind closed doors, consulting development partners only as an afterthought. Furthermore, there remains little to no mention of the NSPP in the 2015 development strategy or recent announcements of the government's priority programmes.

In the past, government officials and party ideological documents have specifically ruled out a 'social democratic' approach to welfare provision based on ideological concerns about creating 'dependency' and the common view in government that East

Asian developmental states paid no attention to social policy at early stages of development (ints. respondents EG2, ED18, EPRDF 2006). While there may have been some incremental change, the revised PSNP, UPSNP and NSPP are perfectly in line with the EPRDF's decades-long 'productivist' commitments. For the government,

'the NSPP shouldn't be about welfare, but about productive investment. It is there that the developmental state orientation comes in The assumption is that if someone has the capacity to be productive, then they should contribute. The government should push society to be productive' (int. respondent ED11).

Indeed, in light of past experience, there is certainly a possibility that the NSPP is primarily a means of packaging existing government initiatives in a way that secures donor support and finance. Rather than donor advocacy of social protection, the primary drivers of government commitment to the PSNP and UPSNP appear to be the paradigmatic commitment to productivism, as well as the need to respond to perceived existential threats.

5. Conclusions

The PSNP's origins have been subject to sharply contrasting interpretations, with some dismissing it as donor-driven, while others – frequently taking official statements at face value – describe it as government conceived. As this paper has shown, the reality is considerably more complex. It is certainly true that donors played a key role in the programme's adoption and design. That said, however, a programme providing support to 10 million people would, quite simply, never have been possible without a high degree of commitment at the very highest levels of government and the resulting mobilisation of the bureaucracy. Despite multiple donor proposals that bore a considerable resemblance to the PSNP over the 10 years prior to the NCFS and pressure from donors at times, nothing happened until the political interests within the political settlement came into alignment.

The EPRDF's developmental strategy favours a broad-based path of economic growth as the best means of addressing poverty and inequality, viewing targeted social programmes as both undesirable and unnecessary. It is only when serious crises are perceived to threaten the political settlement itself that this view has been questioned, providing an opening for social assistance. Even during these 'windows of opportunity', only certain types of productivist policy that align with deeply held paradigmatic ideas are considered. In contrast, on numerous occasions, proposals by external actors for social or conditional cash transfers have been rejected because of their poor fit with the government's core paradigmatic ideas.

The analysis in this paper has highlighted the relevance of the 'adapted political settlements framework' used to guide this research. In particular, elite commitment to social assistance can be clearly traced to dynamics within the political settlement,

notably the 2001 split that led to a greater degree of ideological coherence and existential crises that threatened the political settlement and forced a change in the way in which food insecurity was tackled. The EPRDF had long had a paradigmatic commitment to improving the condition of the peasantry and addressing food insecurity. However, the 2003 food crisis necessitated a change in problem framing, away from a sole concern with agricultural productivity towards the stabilisation of household consumption to provide a base for productivity improvements. Social assistance was framed as a plausible policy solution to this problem.

This analysis demonstrates the importance of complementing interest-based explanations with a focus on ideas. In particular, the degree of 'ideational fit' across different types of idea – for example, between a policy model, dominant problem framing and underlying paradigmatic ideas – has proven to be an important influence on elite commitment. As such, the case study broadly supports the hypotheses for a dominant coalition political settlement, in particular that elite commitment to social protection would be driven primarily by concerns with legitimacy and the need to address political threats and that policy ideas would need to be aligned with dominant paradigmatic ideas within the ruling coalition.

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List of interview respondents

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EG3, director, Food Security Coordination Directorate, Addis Ababa, 5 October 2015.
EG4, expert, Food Security Coordination Directorate, Addis Ababa, 1 and 7 October 2015.
EG5, head of unit, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, Addis Ababa, 5 October 2015.
EG8, chair, Social Protection Platform, MoLSA, Addis Ababa, 9 October 2015.
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ED17, donor representative, Addis Ababa, 5 October 2015.
ED18, donor representative, by skype, 9 July and 22 September 2015.
ED19, donor representative, Addis Ababa, 22 November 2009 and 14 May 2010.
ED20, donor representative, by skype, 24 November 2015.
ED21, donor representative, by skype, 15 July 2015.
ED23, donor representative, by skype, 25 November 2015.
ED24, donor representative, Addis Ababa, 26 January 2016.
ED25, donor representative, Addis Ababa, 28 January 2016.

Consultants

EC1, long-term consultant on social protection and food security, by skype, 22 November 2014 and 16 March 2015.

EC3, long-term consultant on social protection and food security, by skype, 27 March 2015.

EC4, long-term consultant on social protection and food security, Addis Ababa, 6 October 2015.

Academics

EA1, academic working on food security, Addis Ababa, 6 October 2015.

The Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre

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