

https://dspace.org/

Social welfare responses after Covid19 in South Africa A conceptual review

Emmison Muleya; M XWESO

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/45563
DOAJ

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (EHASS)
ISSN – Online 2720-7722 | Print 2821-8949
Volume 6 Issue 7 2025 pp 1006 - 1021
Available online at: https://noyam.org/journals/ehass/
DOI: https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.2025675

Social Welfare Responses after COVID-19 in South Africa: A Conceptual Review

Emmison Muleya[1] & Mzukisi Xweso[2]

[1] Department of Social Work, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.
[2] Lifestyle Diseases Research Entity, Faculty of Health Sciences, North-West University, Mafikeng, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

South Africa is well known for its developmental social welfare programs and progressive social security benefits. However, the socioeconomic environment in the country was permanently impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which revealed deficiencies in the South African government's social welfare responses to disadvantaged groups. This conceptual review aims to critically examine South Africa's social welfare interventions offered to vulnerable groups in reaction to COVID-19, to make necessary recommendations that can be transformative and aligned with social justice principles. This conceptual review drew on rapid appraisal methodology and an empowerment theoretical lens to synthesise accessible research articles and government reports, policy briefs on COVID-19 responses, coupled with the authors' practice experience. The review found that social welfare responses in South Africa to the vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic included social assistance interventions like Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant, and top-up payments to existing grants as well as provision of developmental social welfare interventions to families, children, victims of crime, and vulnerable groups, such as the homeless and elderly. Although we found evidence that these government efforts incorporated elements of empowerment, we recommend that more could have been done to ensure that they were delivered in a dignified manner. This article contributes to scholarship on the provision of social welfare services in a humane way that achieves social justice, a key value in social work, with possible lessons for other countries.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Social Welfare, Social Security, Social Relief of Distress, Social Justice*

Correspondence
Emmison Muleya Email:
Emmi.Muleya@wits.ac.za

Publication History
Received:
25th February, 2025
Accepted:
8th May, 2025
Published:
18th June, 2025

INTRODUCTION

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), commonly referred to as the 2030 Global Agenda for Development, are a comprehensive plan by United Nations Member States to eradicate poverty and promote leaving no one behind. The SDGs aim to be inclusive in the pursuit of human development. This goal aligns with South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) Vision 2030, which aims to provide everyone with a better life.[1] However, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed shortcomings in the South African government's social welfare responses to the pandemic's most vulnerable groups, leaving the socioeconomic landscape with long-lasting effects. The urban poor, who rely heavily on the informal sector, were severely impacted by the economic turmoil caused by forced lockdowns. Although South

[1] Republic of South Africa, "National Development Plan 2012.National Development Plan 2030: Our Future Makes It Work," 2012, https://www.gov.za/documents/national-development-plan-2030-our-future-make-it-work.

© 2025 The Author(s). Published and Maintained by Noyam Journals.
This is an open access article under the CCBY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Africa is known for its extensive and progressive social security and welfare programmes,[2] the majority of workers in the informal sector were left without support because they were not eligible for the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF), which is intended for laid-off workers, nor the means-tested grants intended for vulnerable groups like children, the elderly, or people with disabilities.[3] About two-thirds of South Africans were already impoverished or in danger of becoming so before the country's March 2020 hard lockdown.[4]

Although numerous studies have examined macroeconomic, public health, and broader social policy responses to the informal economy in the aftermath of the pandemic, relatively few have focused specifically on social welfare interventions particularly social grants such as the SRD grant and other social protection measures.[5] Social policy and protection responses are broader than social welfare, often leaning towards social security.

This conceptual article will look at how South Africa has responded to social welfare interventions, which are entwined with developmental social services and social grants in its response to the challenges brought by COVID-19.[6] This article primarily seeks to evaluate whether the social welfare services implemented in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic have fulfilled the principles of social justice. It further examines the limitations and challenges of these interventions, providing an analysis that informs recommendations aimed at fostering transformative change aligned with social justice objectives.

The article will begin with the history of social welfare policies after 1994, a key year in ushering democracy in South Africa, followed by the theoretical framework guiding this article and a discussion on social welfare responses after the pandemic, leading to the main contribution of this article. The article will close off with conclusions on whether these welfare initiatives align with the social justice and empowerment ideals upheld by the social work profession.

METHODOLOGY

Drawing on extensive secondary sources and the authors' practice observations, this conceptual article used a literature review methodology to synthesise accessible research articles and government reports, policies and updates on COVID-19 responses. The authors drew on their vast knowledge of social development and social welfare policies, which they coupled with the latest emerging research literature and policy briefs in this domain of work. This research approach leans towards rapid appraisal methodology, a methodology that Beebe praised for creating an initial, qualitative comprehension of a practice scenario.[7] Rapid assessment is a less organized data-collecting technique that aims to provide the necessary information quickly and economically, according to Ahmad.[8] Rapid appraisal's adaptability and tendency to promote change are its main advantages as a methodology.[9] Given the flexibility that rapid appraisal research provides to facilitate evidence, this approach was chosen for this conceptual article.

---

[2] Antoinette Lombard, "The Implementation of the White Paper for Social Welfare: A Ten-Year Review," *The Social Work Practitioner-Researcher* 20, no. 2 (2008): 154–73; DSD (Department of Social Development), "Summary Report on the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare 1977," 2016, https://www.socialserviceworkforce.org/system/files/resource/files/Summary Report on the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare%2C 1997.pdf.

[3] DSD (Department of Social Development), "Summary Report on the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare 1977."

[4] Jeroen Baas et al., "Scopus as a Curated, High-Quality Bibliometric Data Source for Academic Research in Quantitative Science Studies," *Quantitative Science Studies* 1, no. 1 (February 2020): 377–86, https://doi.org/10.1162/qss_a_00019.

[5] Martha Chen, Michael Rogan, and Kunal Sen, *COVID-19 and the Informal Economy: Impact, Recovery, and the Future.* (Oxford University Press, 2024); L. Patel, J. Triegaardt, and N. Noyoo, " Developmental Social Welfare Services," in *Social Welfare, and Social Development*, ed. L. Patel (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2005); Edwin Yingi, Tomy Ncube, and Everisto Benyera, "Situating Dashed Prospects of Independence into the Xenophobic Narrative in South Africa," *Journal of Black Studies* 55, no. 1 (2024): 68–89; Robert Mutemi Kajiita and Simon Murote Kang'ethe, "The Dynamics Embedded in COVID-19 Pandemic Responses in South Africa: Implications for Public Healthcare Delivery," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Sociality Studies* 4 (May 28, 2024): 1–16, https://doi.org/10.38140/ijss-2024.vol4.09.

[6] Innocent Batsani-Ncube, "Governing from the Opposition?': Tracing the Impact of EFF's 'Niche Populist Politics' on ANC Policy Shifts," *Africa Review* 13, no. 2 (2021): 199–216; DSD, " Integrated Service Delivery Model. ," 2006.

[7] James Beebe, "Basic Concepts and Techniques of Rapid Appraisal," *Human Organization* 54, no. 1 (1995): 42–51.

[8] Hassan Ahmad, "Reintegrating Rapid Appraisal Methodology in Social Science Research," *Development* 11, no. 1 (2021).

[9] Ahmad, "Reintegrating Rapid Appraisal Methodology in Social Science Research."

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis draws on Leonardsen's work on empowerment theory.[10] Income poverty and other general psychosocial welfare issues like mental depression, drug misuse, suicide, homelessness, and family dissolution are two categories of contemporary welfare issues that must be distinguished, according to Leonardsen. Leonardsen proposes that the usual response to addressing these two welfare problems is typically the same, and calls for a different strategy to address them effectively.[11] This article seeks to address the typical response to these welfare challenges, income poverty and generic welfare challenges, drawing inferences from the work of Leonardsen.[12]

Market forces have demonstrated their inability to accommodate and protect everyone, particularly those operating outside the formal market, from the vulnerabilities caused by poverty as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic. Ncube supports this claim by stating that the COVID-19 epidemic has highlighted the inadequacies of neoliberal capitalism in Southern Africa's social policies, underscoring the necessity of reevaluating and realigning these policies to promote resilient and egalitarian societies.[13]

In discussing empowerment, there is a need for a different strategy, especially concerning social welfare responses. Leonardsen believes that making up for missed provisions is a satisfactory way to deal with a loss of revenue, but this is insufficient because it only addresses the symptoms, like a lack of income.[14] For Leonardsen, it would be reasonable to go beyond just addressing the symptoms and instead focus on social problems like poverty and inequality.[15] Poverty and inequality lead to a lack of meaning. Therefore, the state must combat unequal power structures and unfair trade terms in society to empower the poor.[16]

The way the state redistributes resources in society gives it credibility, but regrettably, bureaucratic welfare systems have had conflicting redistributive impacts. The goal of empowerment is to enable recipients of services to become self-sufficient, as will be covered in more detail below. Aligning with this view of empowerment, Piketty argued that redistributing income or assets is part of every public policy, but only if it does as much as possible to improve the opportunities and living standards of the least well.[17] To achieve social justice and empowerment, the rights of those who are less successful must be protected so that they can lead a good life. This analysis critically examines whether South Africa's post-pandemic welfare responses were structured to uphold the intrinsic worth and dignity of those seeking assistance, in line with social justice principles. It further interrogates whether these interventions functioned as instruments of genuine empowerment or merely served to administer and contain the immediate needs of beneficiaries, without addressing underlying structural inequalities.

Post-1994 Social Welfare System

The roots of South Africa's social welfare policies can be traced to the apartheid system, which racialised the provision of social welfare services.[18] After the advent of democracy in 1994, there was a demand for a new welfare system that was transformative and inclusive. The White Paper on Social Welfare of 1997, a new welfare policy, was created as a result of this demand.[19] Due to the high rates of poverty, unemployment, and inequality in South Africa, socioeconomic problems are systemic, ingrained, and require comprehensive solutions. Therefore, it is prudent that any social welfare policy regime following the democratic dispensation operates within the macroeconomic context of transforming South African society to grow the economy, achieve social justice, and forge a united nation. The White Paper on Social

[10] Dag Leonardsen, "Empowerment in Social Work: An Individual vs. a Relational Perspective," *International Journal of Social Welfare* 16, no. 1 (January 5, 2007): 3–11, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2397.2006.00449.x.
[11] Leonardsen, "Empowerment in Social Work: An Individual vs. a Relational Perspective."
[12] Leonardsen, "Empowerment in Social Work: An Individual vs. a Relational Perspective."
[13] Mpumelelo Ncube, "Social Development in Southern Africa in the Wake of COVID-19," *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* 60, no. 1 (2024), https://doi.org/10.15270/60-1-1249.
[14] Leonardsen, "Empowerment in Social Work: An Individual vs. a Relational Perspective."
[15] Leonardsen, "Empowerment in Social Work: An Individual vs. a Relational Perspective."
[16] Leonardsen, "Empowerment in Social Work: An Individual vs. a Relational Perspective."
[17] Thomas Piketty, *The Economics of Inequality: Harvard University Press* (Harvard University Press, 2015).
[18] RSA, "National Development Plan 2012. National Development Plan 2030: Our Future Makes It Work," 2012.
[19] RSA, " White Paper for Social Welfare," 1997.

Welfare was created following extensive consultation with a range of welfare sector stakeholders. It produced a policy framework that was in line with the 1995 United Nations Summit on Social Development, which advocated for a developmental welfare regime to eradicate poverty.[20] This perspective recognised a direct and mutually beneficial link between economic and social development.[21]

To combat poverty and ensure a better life for everyone, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, which were implemented concurrently with the new welfare policy. At the national level, this era also saw the adoption of a neoliberal macroeconomic framework and the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) policy, which was in place from 1996 until the creation of the New Democratic Party (NDP) in 2012. As the South African government adopted neoliberal capitalism, it is important to remember that the objectives of developmental social welfare changed.[22] An important development is that in South Africa, various national policies had to align with global social development pledges.

To address global issues related to development, economic growth, human rights, and national natural environments, South Africa pledged to accomplish the MDGs, which were later replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In South Africa, the SDGs and the NDP share a similar lifespan (2012–2030). It represents a return, at least in policy, to making poverty reduction a top priority in line with the SDGs' sustainable targets for livelihoods.[23] This has provided the basis for social policy and protective responses after COVID-19.

Legislation and socioeconomic policies that were modified or created before COVID-19 to create an environment that supported the delivery of social welfare services cannot be fully described within the parameters of this article. As a result, only a select handful that significantly influenced the advancement of social welfare implementation will be included. To support the delivery of developmental social services, the welfare policy had to be aligned with the Constitution of the Republic, Act 108 of 1996.[24] For people who are unable to sustain themselves and their dependents, the Constitution's Section 27 (1) (c) guarantees the right to appropriate social assistance. This constitutional framework has led to the creation of a system of social subsidies that are mostly granted to groups of persons who are thought to be most likely to be unable to support themselves, such as children, the elderly, and those with disabilities.

The legal framework most relevant to this discussion is the Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004.[25] This legislation is intended to provide for the rendering of social assistance to persons, provide for the mechanism for the rendering of such aid, and establish an inspectorate for social assistance.[26] The South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) was created as an agency for the administration and payment of social assistance as well as the provision of associated services by the Social Security Agency Act 9 of 2004, which was also made possible by this legislation.

The Financial Policy for Developmental Social Services of 1999, the Integrated Service Delivery Model the Policy on Financial Awards to Service Providers, and the Procedural Guidelines for the Implementation of the Policy on Financial Awards to Service Providers were among the important policies created to support the implementation of social welfare in addition to this legislative framework.[27] Social assistance through social security grants and developmental social welfare services are the two ways South Africa has offered social welfare services.[28]

---

[20] Jean D. Triegaardt, "Social Policy Domains: Social Welfare and Social Security in South Africa," *International Social Work* 45, no. 3 (May 1, 2002): 325–36, https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872802045003359.
[21] A. Lombard, "The Impact of Social Welfare Policies on Social Development in South Africa: An NGO Perspective," *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* 43, no. 4 (June 27, 2014), https://doi.org/10.15270/43-4-260.
[22] Lombard, "The Implementation of the White Paper for Social Welfare: A Ten-Year Review."
[23] Emmison Muleya, "Developmental Social Work and the Sustainable Development Goals in South Africa: Opportunities and Challenges," *The International Journal of Community and Social Development* 2, no. 4 (December 4, 2020): 470–86, https://doi.org/10.1177/2516602620975226.
[24] RSA, "Constitution of South Africa. Act 108 of 1996."
[25] RSA, "Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004."
[26] RSA, "Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004."
[27] RSA, "Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004"; Lombard, "The Implementation of the White Paper for Social Welfare: A Ten-Year Review."
[28] DSD, " Integrated Service Delivery Model."

In South Africa, social assistance payments are crucial to the fight against poverty. Nearly half (47%) of households received at least one financial assistance before the epidemic, and it is hardly unexpected that cash transfers have broad (rapid, short-term) poverty-reduction effects given their extensive coverage.[29] Various other studies have documented the positive impact of social assistance grants, such as elderly grants, care dependency grants and importantly children's support grants, not only in reducing poverty but also in stimulating economic growth and diversifying livelihoods.[30]

Despite this, some scholars have expressed scepticism about the need for a grant that could cover basic incomes for the unemployed. Previous attempts to implement a basic income award as a social assistance measure failed because of the adoption of neoliberal capitalism.[31] To alleviate poverty in South Africa, Maki presents a strong argument in favour of a basic income handout.[32] Maki's research, however, finds that since several anti-poverty initiatives, such as extended public works programmes amongst others already in place were effective, there was no need to provide the basic income grant.[33]

According to Muleya, Article 11 of the NDP addresses social protection and highlights the contribution of developmental social welfare services to the elimination of poverty and the reduction of socioeconomic disparities.[34] Therefore, it may be concluded that the South African government has recognized, in principle, that the social and economic advancement of formerly underprivileged individuals, families, and communities should be given priority in developmental social welfare services. Social protection is one of the NDP's top concerns, in accordance with the Constitution's mandate. By making sure that preventive, transformative, generative, and protective measures are in place for human well-being across all societal sectors, it is envisioned as guaranteeing inclusive social development.[35] Through the NDP, the government hopes to increase public awareness of the social pathologies that could impede progress and implement measures to eradicate or drastically reduce their negative impacts.

Through the implementation of community development strategies and publicly funded social services and programmes, including free primary and secondary education, subsidized tertiary education, primary healthcare, housing, and jobs in the public works sector, the NDP aspires to advance its developmental and social justice objectives.[36] Since social protection lessens the consequences of poverty, illness, and social and economic vulnerability, it has long been viewed as a way to preserve everyone's basic living standards. Social protection calms anxieties and provides comfort and confidence that these issues won't increase poverty.

Recent scholarly debates have increasingly interrogated whether traditional perspectives on social welfare reinforce a dependency paradigm or whether social protection programmes can be deliberately designed to advance social justice and meaningfully reduce inequality.[37] Drawing on principles aligned with the developmental social welfare approach, such programmes emphasize not merely the passive delivery of assistance but the active promotion of human capabilities, social inclusion, and long-term empowerment. This shift reflects broader theoretical tensions between residual welfare models, which prioritize short-term relief, and developmental or social investment models, which seek to address structural inequalities and foster sustainable social transformation.[38] By establishing sustainable jobs and implementing suitable social protection measures, the NDP pledges to eradicate poverty and drastically reduce socioeconomic disparities by 2030.

[29] Simone Schotte, Rocco Zizzamia, and Murray Leibbrandt, "A Poverty Dynamics Approach to Social Stratification: The South African Case," *World Development* 110 (October 2018): 88–103, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.05.024.
[30] Lombard, "The Implementation of the White Paper for Social Welfare: A Ten-Year Review"; Mel Gray and Antoinette Lombard, "Progress of the Social Service Professions in South Africa's Developmental Social Welfare System: Social Work, and Child and Youth Care Work," *International Journal of Social Welfare* 32, no. 4 (October 10, 2023): 429–41, https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.12562;Timothy Köhler and Haroon Bhorat, "Can Cash Transfers Aid Labour Market Recovery," *Evidence from South Africa's Special COVID-19 Grant*, no. 202 (2021): 429–41.
[31] Lombard, "The Implementation of the White Paper for Social Welfare: A Ten-Year Review."
[32] Mzoxolo Maki, *Addressing Poverty in South Africa: An Investigation of the Basic Income Grant* (University of Pretoria (South Africa), 2009).
[33] Maki, *Addressing Poverty in South Africa: An Investigation of the Basic Income Grant*.
[34] Muleya, "Developmental Social Work and the Sustainable Development Goals in South Africa: Opportunities and Challenges."
[35] RSA, "National Development Plan 2012. National Development Plan 2030: Our Future Makes It Work."
[36] RSA, "National Development Plan 2012. National Development Plan 2030: Our Future Makes It Work."
[37] IFSW., "The Role of Social Work in Social Protection Systems: The Universal Right to Social Protection," 2016.
[38] RSA, " White Paper for Social Welfare."

By preventing people from experiencing (deeper) poverty and vulnerability through educational, family, and community-based promotional activities, social protection assumes a promotive role that extends beyond mere income support, actively fostering resilience and long-term well-being. As previously mentioned, the state's social grants programme, school food programmes, and initiatives for senior citizens that encourage active ageing are all important examples of this.[39] As seen in the section below on COVID-19 responses, social protection also serves the purpose of shielding the most vulnerable and at-risk persons and households from additional exposure to poverty and deprivation and offering timely support once exposure has already happened.[40]

Before the pandemic, the government's protective function was evident through the provision and funding or subsidising of residential facilities for the vulnerable, such as victims and survivors of gender-based violence, human trafficking, older people, and child and youth care centres. Through the provision of developmental, rehabilitative, and therapeutic services by the Department of Social Development in collaboration with civil society organizations, social protection also contributes to the advancement of developmental social welfare services by improving the capacity of individuals, communities, and institutions to engage in all forms of activity.[41]

The Department of Social Development, through its Sustainable Livelihoods Unit, has long provided skills development training opportunities linked to business startups. This approach can be seen as transformative and developmental, as citizens are empowered to lead independent lifestyles and not rely on the government for their livelihoods. Through initiatives like Welfare to Work and the Extended Public Works programmes, there have also been calls for social grant recipients and social welfare service participants to be connected to development programmes as a means of leaving the Department of Social Development's welfare service stream.[42]

It should be noted that the government’s dependency on social protection as a way of addressing challenges such as persistent poverty has led to the neglect of the developmental nature of social welfare, and the subsequent intention to lead to social development. [43]As a result, the social welfare sector is not keeping up with its developmental responsibility, even though it has embraced a progressive approach to service delivery. In South Africa's social welfare history, the provision of social security has accounted for the bulk of social welfare budget expenditure.[44] The government has long acknowledged that while social payments significantly reduce the extreme poverty experienced by a large number of South African households, the cost of social security is rising and has been identified as unsustainable.[45]

Post-COVID-19 Social Welfare Responses

Globally, COVID-19 led to severe public health measures, such as strict lockdowns in numerous nations, especially those in Africa. African social protection reactions to COVID-19 were highlighted in a study by Devereux.[46] Social assistance in the form of regular food or cash transfers for vulnerable non-working groups and social insurance, primarily for nominally employed persons, are the two most prevalent social protection solutions to poverty.[47] South Africa's response to the pandemic followed a similar approach.[48] Many governments created special funds to raise ring-fenced resources to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 and introduced temporary income support that was distributed to millions of African households in 2020. These governments were primarily in West and Central Africa (Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Gabon,

[39] DSD (Department of Social Development), “Summary Report on the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare 1977.”
[40] IFSW., “The Role of Social Work in Social Protection Systems: The Universal Right to Social Protection.”
[41] DSD (Department of Social Development), “Summary Report on the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare 1977”; IFSW., “The Role of Social Work in Social Protection Systems: The Universal Right to Social Protection.”
[42] DSD (Department of Social Development), “Summary Report on the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare 1977.”
[43] Lombard, “The Impact of Social Welfare Policies on Social Development in South Africa: An NGO Perspective.”
[44] Köhler and Bhorat, “Can Cash Transfers Aid Labour Market Recovery.”
[45] RSA, “National Development Plan 2012. National Development Plan 2030: Our Future Makes It Work.”
[46] Stephen Devereux, “Social Protection Responses to COVID-19 in Africa,” *Global Social Policy* 21, no. 3 (December 1, 2021): 421–47, https://doi.org/10.1177/14680181211021260.
[47] Lena Gronbach, Jeremy Seekings, and Vayda Megannon, “Social Protection in the COVID-19 Pandemic: Lessons from South Africa,” *Center for Global Development Policy Paper* 252 (2022).
[48] Devereux, “Social Protection Responses to COVID-19 in Africa.”

Mauritania, Senegal), but they were also in North Africa (Morocco) and Southern Africa (Botswana, Lesotho, Mauritius, and South Africa).[49]

Many governments, particularly in East and Southern Africa, which are susceptible to drought, decided to provide food aid through the World Food Programme in addition to cash transfers to ensure household food security. For example, in urban areas, food was distributed from home to home by the governments of Rwanda, Uganda and Botswana. Every three days, flour, beans, and rice were provided to Rwanda. Nevertheless, the food packages that were given out in Uganda were tiny and of poor quality.[50] Other governments introduced food price control measures, banned the export of food commodities, and waived import duties and tariffs as proactive responses to the pandemic. Furthermore, other African governments, such as Kenya and Madagascar, introduced tax relief measures.

Extending current social assistance grants, launching the SRD grant, and strengthening developmental social welfare programmes were the cornerstones of South Africa's social welfare response to the COVID-19 epidemic. Additionally, new welfare responses were introduced or increased, such as the strategic response to homelessness by the provincial government in Gauteng through its Department of Social Development.[51] The state's response to COVID-19 focused on health interventions and economic relief measures adopted by the government as immediate interventions during the state of disaster.[52] Take, for instance, interventions in Gauteng and other provinces around homelessness.[53] These interventions provided immediate relief and support to vulnerable populations, providing temporary shelter, food, and essential services to the homeless population. Moreover, they aimed to mitigate the health risks associated with homelessness, such as the potential spread of COVID-19 in crowded or unsanitary living conditions.

Although they offered critical short-term assistance, these measures did not provide sustainable, long-term solutions to homelessness. The focus was on immediate relief rather than addressing the root causes of homelessness, such as unemployment, lack of affordable housing, and systemic socio-economic inequalities.[54] Additionally, these interventions lacked integration with social welfare programmes that could help individuals transition out of homelessness through job training, mental health services, or permanent housing solutions.

In response to COVID-19, President Ramaphosa launched a social relief and economic support package worth R500 billion (USD 3 billion) on April 21. This represents 10% of GDP, according to Devereux.[55] A loan guarantee programme to support 700,000 major, small, and medium-sized firms with 3 million employees and a Temporary Employee/Employer Relief Scheme (TERS) to reduce job losses were among the business protection measures.

The UIF provided unemployment payments to laid-off employees in the formal sector.[56] These measures, along with introducing the SRD grant and top-ups to existing social grants, seemed to reflect a robust social welfare response to the pandemic's economic fallout. However, upon closer examination, these measures fell short of addressing the more profound, systemic issues within the social welfare system. While the SRD grant and grant top-ups provided much-needed immediate relief, they failed to offer a sustainable solution for the vulnerable populations they targeted.

[49] Devereux, "Social Protection Responses to COVID-19 in Africa."
[50] Devereux, "Social Protection Responses to COVID-19 in Africa."
[51] GDSD (Gauteng Department of Social Development), *Gauteng City Strategy on Adult Street Homelessness 2020-2024*, 2021; R Sonko-Najjemba et al., "An Assessment of the Needs of Homeless People in Gauteng Province, in the Context of COVID-19," *Strategic Analytics and Management (Pty) Ltd. Report for Gauteng Department of Social Development*, 2021.
[52] Ben Scully, "South Africa's Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic: The Crisis in the Context of the History of South African Capitalism" (Working Paper, 2023); Pieter Fourie and Guy Lamb, *The South African Response to COVID-19* (London: Routledge, 2023), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003294931; Gronbach, Seekings, and Megannon, "Social Protection in the COVID-19 Pandemic: Lessons from South Africa"; Köhler and Bhorat, "Can Cash Transfers Aid Labour Market Recovery"; Devereux, "Social Protection Responses to COVID-19 in Africa."
[53] Sonko-Najjemba et al., "An Assessment of the Needs of Homeless People in Gauteng Province, in the Context of COVID-19."
[54] Leon Roets et al., "A Synthesis of Homelessness in South Africa: A Rapid Critical Appraisal," *Development Southern Africa* 33, no. 5 (September 2, 2016): 613–27, https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2016.1203756.
[55] Devereux, "Social Protection Responses to COVID-19 in Africa."
[56] Eldridge Moses and Ingrid Woolard, "The Role of Temporary Social Grants in Mitigating the Poverty Impact of COVID-19 in South Africa," *The South African Response to COVID-19: The Early Years. New York: Routledge*, 2023, 156–77.

The SRD grant, for instance, provided temporary financial assistance to millions of unemployed South Africans. Still, its short-term nature and low value meant it did little to lift recipients out of poverty or provide long-term empowerment. Additionally, the reliance on social assistance as a quick-fix solution to the economic crisis raised concerns about fostering dependency rather than promoting self-sufficiency.[57] Despite this reality, we strongly believe that social grants do cushion the vulnerable from falling deeper into poverty. Perhaps the ideas envisioned in the Integrated Service Delivery Model for an interdependent relationship between the three programmes of Social Development specifically community development, social welfare, and social security would assist reduce dependency. [58] Programmes such as the welfare to work and sustainable livelihoods programmes are meant to exit the recipients of social security grants and welfare interventions.

Before the epidemic, South Africa's economy was already struggling, with some of the highest rates of unemployment and inequality in the world.[59] Many workers lost their employment permanently or temporarily as a result of the unexpected shock of the lockdown, which had a catastrophic effect on many homes, particularly the poor.[60] Although social insurance was used to implement several social policy responses in the areas of health, education, and the economy, very few of these responses specifically examined social welfare.[61]

One of the first policy briefs to highlight social protection as a welfare response to the COVID-19 pandemic was produced by the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, which was co-sponsored by the Government of Brazil and the United Nations Development Programme.[62] The policy brief explained the government's two-pronged, primarily cash-based strategy, which consists of social security and social assistance programmes, while also acknowledging South Africa's long-standing and sophisticated social protection structure. The 11.3 million social grant recipients in South Africa, according to Gronbach, began receiving additional payments in May 2020.[63] According to other surveys, there are around 18 million grant recipients.[64]

In addition to the existing social assistance grants, such as disability, children's support grants, older persons, care dependency, military veterans, and foster care grants, the government introduced the SRD grant. The SASSA, which also oversees the nation's other social grant programmes, introduced this stipend, which, according to DSD, was worth ZAR350 (USD24) per month in 2020 currency rates.[65] Those who were unemployed and not receiving unemployment benefits, social grants, or stipends from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), not receiving any other government COVID-19 response support, not living in a government-funded or subsidized institution, or receiving any other type of government assistance were eligible to receive the grant. The recipients had to be South African citizens, permanent residents, or registered refugees of at least eighteen years old.

The SRD grant initiative was set to run for six months, but the grant has been extended numerous times and is currently being considered for further extension. The programme first experienced several teething issues with its online application portal, intricate verification procedure, and payment system, which resulted in payment delays and the denial of qualified recipients.[66] However, by the end of October

[57] Köhler and Bhorat, "Can Cash Transfers Aid Labour Market Recovery"; IFSW Policy Paper, *The Role of Social Work in Social Protection Systems: The Universal Right to Social Protection*, 2016, https://www.ifsw.org/the-role-of-social-work-in-social-protection-systems-the-universal-right-to-social-protection/; Alice Tihelková, "Framing the 'Scroungers': The Re-Emergence of the Stereotype of the Undeserving Poor and Its Reflection in the British Press," *Brno Studies in English* 41, no. 2 (2015): 121–39, https://doi.org/10.5817/BSE2015-2-8.

[58] DSD, "Summary Report on the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare 1977."

[59] Devereux, "Social Protection Responses to COVID-19 in Africa."

[60] Moses and Woolard, "The Role of Temporary Social Grants in Mitigating the Poverty Impact of COVID-19 in South Africa."

[61] Scully, "South Africa's Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic: The Crisis in the Context of the History of South African Capitalism"; Ndangwa Noyoo, "South Africa's Social Policy Response to Covid-19: Relief Measures in an Unequal Society," 2021, https://media-api.suub.uni-bremen.de/api/core/bitstreams/fd6a0c7c-b876-4d86-84eb-205430ae1749/content.

[62] Lena Gronbach, "South Africa's Social Protection Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic," 2021.

[63] Gronbach, "South Africa's Social Protection Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic."

[64] Noyoo, "South Africa's Social Policy Response to Covid-19: Relief Measures in an Unequal Society"; Leila Patel, Viwe Dikoko, and Jade Archer, "Social Grants, Livelihoods and Poverty Responses of Social Grant Beneficiaries in South Africa," *Johannesburg: Centre for Social Development in Africa, University of Johannesburg. December* 9 (2023): 2023.

[65] DSD, " The Rapid Assessment of the Implementation and Utilisation of the Special COVID-19 SRD Grant. ," 2021.

[66] Devereux, "Social Protection Responses to COVID-19 in Africa"; Gronbach, "South Africa's Social Protection Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic"; DSD, " The Rapid Assessment of the Implementation and Utilisation of the Special COVID-19 SRD Grant."

2020, 6 million people had successfully received South Africa's first temporary basic income award.[67] Since then, there have been numerous requests to make the SRD grant a permanent basic income grant.[68]

The grant delivery faced challenges, including long queues at South African Post Offices for those who could not access grants through eWallet or USSD services.[69] Some recipients had to wake up early and travel long distances to get the grant. Some recipients turned to hiring security guards and a group of self-appointed residents to deal with long lines, known as queue marshals, who sold places in line to latecomers for about R100 from their R350.[70] Furthermore, some recipients would not collect the grant for two months and only go to collect after the third month, so it could be higher, as transport costs and the cost of buying food while waiting in long queues were too high. Corruption, lack of administrative capability, and growing dependence were problems in the delivery of SRD.[71]

The DSD's rapid assessment report also discovered that the grant's requirements were discriminatory and that mothers who were already receiving government assistance were at a disadvantage when applying for grants like the Child Support Grant for their children.[72] Additionally, those in need misinterpreted information regarding the criteria, the application process, and access. For example, many applicants in rural areas were probably less tech-savvy, less educated, and mostly relied on word-of-mouth.[73] Therefore, poor communication about the process could have resulted in eligible individuals missing out on the grant, and improving the digital divide would be highly beneficial.

Despite these obstacles, COVID-19 SRD recipients stated that the grant improved their own and their family's quality of life.[74] In particular, the grant was used to look for jobs, buy food, and augment household income.[75] It made it possible for recipients to get necessities like food and clothing, raise living standards, reduce poverty, and—most importantly—reach previously unreached demographics. Additionally, the grant funded childcare, improved digital skills, and money for job search.[76]

In addition to social assistance grant interventions, South Africa also implements developmental social welfare services through developmental, rehabilitative, and therapeutic services provided by the DSD in partnership with civil society organisations. In addition to reducing access to social support and services like daycare, the pandemic exacerbated stress and poverty, which put children and families under additional strain and increased the likelihood of harsh parenting and child abuse.[77]

According to Shenderovich et al. poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity were widespread during the pandemic, especially among the poorest people.[78] Naicker's study found that, in the face of growing financial difficulties, keeping families confined to their homes for prolonged periods caused routine disturbances, changes in roles and duties, and ultimately, changes in relationships.[79] Ultimately, this environment influenced the services provided by family-supporting organizations, and during the pandemic, these organizations had to modify their service delivery methods, including offering services online. This posed challenges, mainly due to the lack of information and communication technologies for both families and, in some instances, practitioners. The pandemic did, however, have the benefit of speeding up remote service delivery and highlighting the significance of taking access barriers into

[67] Gronbach, "South Africa's Social Protection Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic."
[68] Gronbach, "South Africa's Social Protection Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic"; Engenas Senona, "South Africa Desperately Needs Basic Income Support, Now More than Ever Before," *New Agenda: South African Journal of Social and Economic Policy* 78 (2020).
[69] L. Human et al., "Long Queues at Post Offices as Activists Picket for COVID-19 Grant Extension," 2021.
[70] DSD, "The Rapid Assessment of the Implementation and Utilisation of the Special COVID-19 SRD Grant," 2021.
[71] Robert Mutemi Kajiita and Simon Murote Kang'ethe, "Paradoxes of Social Grants in South Africa: The Case of COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 5, no. 7 (July 2, 2024): 1133–45, https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.2024577.
[72] DSD, "The Rapid Assessment of the Implementation and Utilisation of the Special COVID-19 SRD Grant."
[73] DSD, "The Rapid Assessment of the Implementation and Utilisation of the Special COVID-19 SRD Grant."
[74] DSD, " The Rapid Assessment of the Implementation and Utilisation of the Special COVID-19 SRD Grant."
[75] DSD, "The Rapid Assessment of the Implementation and Utilisation of the Special COVID-19 SRD Grant."
[76] Kajiita and Kang'ethe, "Paradoxes of Social Grants in South Africa: The Case of COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant."
[77] Sara Naicker and Linda Richter, "Parenting amid COVID-19: Challenges and Supports for Families with Young Children in South Africa," *South African Journal of Child Health* 16, no. 1 (2022): 45–51; Yulia Shenderovich et al., "Adaptations and Staff Experiences in Delivering Parenting Programmes and Other Family Support Services in Three Community-Based Organisations in Cape Town, South Africa during the COVID Pandemic," *Global Public Health* 18, no. 1 (January 2, 2023), https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2022.2129725.
[78] Shenderovich et al., "Adaptations and Staff Experiences in Delivering Parenting Programmes and Other Family Support Services in Three Community-Based Organisations in Cape Town, South Africa during the COVID Pandemic."
[79] Naicker and Richter, "Parenting amid COVID-19: Challenges and Supports for Families with Young Children in South Africa."

account when planning service delivery. For example, this can be achieved by allocating funds to and supplying mobile devices and data to staff and families, or by figuring out how these can be accessed.[80]

The National Department of Social Development, in partnership with civil society organisations, also piloted a parenting programme online during the pandemic.[81] During COVID-19, the *ParentText* was created as an interactive chatbot that was modelled after evidence-based in-person parenting programmes, such as the Sinovuyo Caring Families Programmes, which have been used in South Africa before and have been shown to increase positive parenting practices and decrease violence against children. Employee fatigue, health concerns from in-person work, difficulties working from home, and new duties and responsibilities were all caused by the epidemic.

Challenges were also experienced for other groups dealt with through social welfare services, including victims of crime, persons with substance abuse disorders, and the homeless. For example, Harker et al.'s study examined how the number of SUD treatment episodes during the pandemic's peak changed, as well as how SUD treatment providers perceived the effects of COVID-19-related restrictions on SUD patients and the provision of SUD treatment services in South Africa.[82] According to their research, the COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on South Africa's SUD treatment services, especially at the beginning of the outbreak. This led to a rise in anxiety among patients, a worsening of pre-existing mental health issues, and in certain situations, the initiation of relapse.[83]

Their study recommended more effective ways to increase the nation's readiness for upcoming medical crises and provide all South Africans with access to SUD treatment. Although different provincial governments, such as Gauteng, the Western Cape and KwaZulu, made funds available, the impact of these measures remains to be investigated. In Gauteng, for instance, some local governments questioned whether the funds allocated to the homeless were being used effectively and efficiently.[84]

For victims of crime, Vetten found that the South African government was proactive in declaring shelters an essential service, requiring them to operate during lockdown, as were the courts, which were needed to grant protection orders under the Domestic Violence Act (among other urgent matters). Despite this, domestic violence increased during the pandemic.[85] Vetten aptly captured this when she stated, "While confining every person to his or her residence was intended to contain the epidemic, it also had the unintended effect of making the household the most likely site of violence during this period, households that were already home to a great deal of conflict."[86]

Vetten concluded that different kinds of policy responses around care and support were required to address violence in future pandemics.[87] Another study by Mahlangu et al found that some women experienced violence during the hard lockdown, primarily emotional partner violence and that children experienced physical violence.[88] Like Vetten, they recommended that policy responses to care, such as psychosocial support, be provided to men and women to mitigate the mental health impacts of pandemics and lockdowns in the future.[89]

Social protection in the form of social assistance payments and other developmental social welfare interventions for families and other vulnerable groups, including the homeless, women, children, and victims of crime, served as the foundation for South Africa's social welfare responses to the pandemic. But did these initiatives follow the empowering principles? This question will be addressed in the section that follows.

---

[80] Shenderovich et al., "Adaptations and Staff Experiences in Delivering Parenting Programmes and Other Family Support Services in Three Community-Based Organisations in Cape Town, South Africa during the COVID Pandemic."
[81] DSD, " ParentText Launches in South Africa!," 2022.
[82] Nadine Harker et al., "COVID 19—Impact on Substance Use Treatment Utilization and Provision in South Africa," *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy* 17, no. 1 (December 3, 2022): 15, https://doi.org/10.1186/s13011-022-00446-6.
[83] Harker et al., "COVID 19—Impact on Substance Use Treatment Utilization and Provision in South Africa."
[84] S. Parakozov, "Homelessness a Hot Potato for the City and NGOs. ," 2023.
[85] Lisa Vetten, "The Impact of the COVID-19 Lockdown on Domestic Violence in South Africa: What Do We Know," *Research Brief* 1 (2021): 1–16.
[86] Vetten, "The Impact of the COVID-19 Lockdown on Domestic Violence in South Africa: What Do We Know."
[87] Vetten, "The Impact of the COVID-19 Lockdown on Domestic Violence in South Africa: What Do We Know."
[88] P., Gibbs, A., Shai, N., Machisa, M., and Skweyiya, Y. Mahlangu, " Impact of COVID-19 Lockdown and Link to Women and Children's Experiences of Violence in the Home in South Africa. ," *BMC Public Health,* 22, no. 1029 (2022): 1–11.
[89] Vetten, "The Impact of the COVID-19 Lockdown on Domestic Violence in South Africa: What Do We Know."

COVID-19 and Beyond: Implications for Social Welfare, Social Justice and Empowerment

Gronbach and Devereux maintain that, in contrast to most African nations, South Africa's social protection response to COVID-19 was comprehensive.[90] However, rather than achieving social justice, it relied mainly on measures based on money. Noyoo shares this opinion.[91] Moses and Woolard observe that even after receiving the increased funds, many households continued to live below the poverty line, despite social assistance interventions that helped them deal with the economic slump caused by the pandemic.[92] However, the literature generally agrees that, despite certain restrictions, social grants in South Africa have been extremely important in reducing poverty, raising living standards, and tackling inequality.[93]

The decision to implement the SRD grant has received tremendous support from a variety of sources due to the assistance it provided to households during the pandemic. For example, recipients can raise living conditions, reduce poverty, and obtain necessities like food and clothing.[94] The COVID-19 grants supported childcare, improved digital skills, addressed previously underserved populations, and offered financial assistance for job searching.[95] Therefore, in terms of alignment with social justice and empowerment principles, the SRD grant targeted some of the vulnerable members of society, such as unemployed persons, the elderly, and the disabled, prioritising those in greatest need. Although the grant provided only temporary financial relief, it empowered individuals to meet basic needs during a crisis, like food, shelter, and clothing, essential for human dignity. It gave recipients financial autonomy, allowing them to make choices about their lives and prioritise their needs.

This empowerment led organisations and activists, such as the Social Policy Initiative, the Institute for Economic Justice, and Black Sash, to call for the SRD grant to become permanent.[96] Although this initiative may pressure the national budget, it would be a justifiable expense. By prioritising social welfare investments that address poverty and inequality, the government can redirect public funds that would otherwise be lost to corruption and mismanagement, ensuring that resources are used effectively to support vulnerable populations and contribute to long-term social development. This approach would foster fiscal responsibility and align with principles of good governance, ensuring transparency and accountability in managing social assistance initiatives.

In addition to cash transfers, which are a type of social assistance, the other social welfare initiatives mentioned above, such as those for families, victims of crime, and individuals with substance use disorders, show a need for adaptation in service delivery, with lessons for promoting digital services in the future.[97]

As mentioned above, Leonardsen argues that if social work services are to benefit recipients and empower them, they must not only focus on symptoms like a lack of income, which the COVID-19 SRD grant and other social assistance interventions were intended to address.[98] Rather, they need to address the underlying causes of inequality and poverty.

Fouksman and Dawson postulate that the social grant system embodies a seemingly paradoxical idea: It is both generously broad in terms of the numbers reached and insufficient to reduce high rates of

[90] Gronbach, "South Africa's Social Protection Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic"; DSD, "The Rapid Assessment of the Implementation and Utilisation of the Special COVID-19 SRD Grant."
[91] Noyoo, "South Africa's Social Policy Response to Covid-19: Relief Measures in an Unequal Society."
[92] Moses and Woolard, "The Role of Temporary Social Grants in Mitigating the Poverty Impact of COVID-19 in South Africa."
[93] Lombard, "The Implementation of the White Paper for Social Welfare: A Ten-Year Review"; Patel, Dikoko, and Archer, "Social Grants, Livelihoods and Poverty Responses of Social Grant Beneficiaries in South Africa."
[94] Noyoo, "South Africa's Social Policy Response to Covid-19: Relief Measures in an Unequal Society"; E. Fouksman and H. J. Dawson, "Redistributive Politics and the Temporalities of Crisis: Reconfiguring Social Protection in a Post-Pandemic South Africa," *Global Social Policy* 24, no. 2 (August 30, 2024): 242–60, https://doi.org/10.1177/14680181231201493; Moses and Woolard, "The Role of Temporary Social Grants in Mitigating the Poverty Impact of COVID-19 in South Africa"; DSD, " The Rapid Assessment of the Implementation and Utilisation of the Special COVID-19 SRD Grant. ."
[95] Kajiita and Kang'ethe, "Paradoxes of Social Grants in South Africa: The Case of COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant"; Gronbach, "South Africa's Social Protection Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic."
[96] Gronbach, "South Africa's Social Protection Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic"; Senona, "South Africa Desperately Needs Basic Income Support, Now More than Ever Before."
[97] Vetten, "The Impact of the COVID-19 Lockdown on Domestic Violence in South Africa: What Do We Know"; P Mahlangu et al., "Impact of COVID-19 Lockdown and Link to Women and Children's Experiences of Violence in the Home in South Africa," *BMC Public Health* 22, no. 1 (December 21, 2022): 1029, https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-13422-3.
[98] Leonardsen, "Empowerment in Social Work: An Individual vs. a Relational Perspective."

racialised poverty.[99] Although the system essentially overturned racial discrimination, it ignored persistent structural disparities.This system could, therefore, be characterised, albeit with sensitivity, as an extension of the apartheid welfare system that came before it.

The SRD grant came with conditions, such as requiring applicants to actively seek employment, which may not be realistic or empowering for all individuals, particularly those facing structural barriers to employment. Furthermore, the grant amount was relatively small, which may not have been sufficient to lift individuals out of poverty or promote long-term empowerment because it did not resolve the underlying problems. Furthermore, the application process for the grant was cumbersome, preventing access to the grant and undermining its potential for empowerment. For instance, many applicants in rural areas were probably less tech-savvy or educated and mainly relied on word-of-mouth advertising. Thus, poor communication about the process could have resulted in qualified individuals missing out on the grant.

Because of the grant's discriminatory requirements, women already getting government assistance for their children and others eligible for aid were not included. Additionally, challenges with technology may have excluded those who qualified for the grant.[100] Another problem was that the dignity of the recipients was not considered when the beneficiaries had to queue for grants publicly, spending days in queues amid the pandemic. The grant was sometimes stigmatised, and recipients faced with shame or embarrassment when collecting their grants in public. The application and collection processes were often impersonal and dehumanising, with recipients facing long queues, complex paperwork, and impersonal interactions with officials.

Officials or community members may have patronizing attitudes towards recipients, undermining their dignity and autonomy. Recipients may have felt surveilled or monitored, as they were required to provide personal information and documentation to receive the grant.[101] These problems with the grant suggest that although the government made progress toward achieving social justice by providing for the vulnerable and marginalised, it did not ensure the dignity of its citizens. Therefore, the approach to delivering grants and other developmental social welfare services to recipients needs to be reformed and linked to exit outcomes that go beyond just addressing the symptoms and instead focus on social problems like poverty and inequality.[102] The state must combat unequal power structures and unfair terms of commerce in societyto empower the disadvantaged because poverty and inequality result in lack of meaning.[103]

RECOMMENDATIONS

The authors in this article identified social justice and empowerment themes, including targeted support and temporary relief measures. However, the limited scope of support, bureaucratic obstacles, the digital divide, and insufficient preparedness for future crises need further investigation. Thus, the authors recommend that, in addition to upholding the dignity of SRD grant recipients, government agencies, particularly the Department of Social Development and the SASSA, should take responsibility for simplifying and humanising the application process. Furthermore, they should ensure financial education and support, foster a culture of respect and empathy, protect confidentiality and privacy, and encourage recipient participation in decision-making processes.

Furthermore, it is recommended that civil society organisations and relevant stakeholders collaborate to ensure that efforts such as simplifying the application process, providing financial education, and fostering respect and empathy are implemented. Addressing these issues will help to uphold the dignity of SRD grant recipients and transform the grant into a more empowering and dignified form of support. The pandemic affected the delivery of developmental social welfare services for vulnerable populations. However, the transition to online service delivery presented the government with

[99] Fouksman and Dawson, "Redistributive Politics and the Temporalities of Crisis: Reconfiguring Social Protection in a Post-Pandemic South Africa."
[100] Devereux, "Social Protection Responses to COVID-19 in Africa"; DSD, " The Rapid Assessment of the Implementation and Utilisation of the Special COVID-19 SRD Grant. ."
[101] Human et al., "Long Queues at Post Offices as Activists Picket for COVID-19 Grant Extension."
[102] Leonardsen, "Empowerment in Social Work: An Individual vs. a Relational Perspective."
[103] Leonardsen, "Empowerment in Social Work: An Individual vs. a Relational Perspective."

an opportunity to modernize information and communication technologies. This modernization has the potential to enhance the accessibility, efficiency, and scope of social welfare programmes, ultimately improving service delivery to better meet the needs of disadvantaged populations.

CONCLUSION

This article highlighted the desperate need to harness social welfare responses that empower the vulnerable during times like COVID-19. Social welfare responses in South Africa to the vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic included social assistance interventions like the SRD grant and top-up payments to existing grants. Additionally, developmental social welfare interventions were provided to families, children, victims of crime, and vulnerable groups, such as the homeless and elderly. This article acknowledged the gains the government has scored in improving access to social protection measures such as the SRD grant and other social welfare interventions around family services. Although these efforts incorporated elements of empowerment and social justice as envisaged by Leonardsen, more could have been done to ensure they were delivered in a dignified manner.

Despite the benefit's short-term usefulness, the interim social protection measures that were implemented, like the SRD award, significantly decreased poverty, provided access to previously excluded groups, and addressed a significant vacuum in social provision for the unemployed and informal workers. However, they only partially aligned with social justice principles because they did not address structural issues and promote sustainable empowerment.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ahmad, Hassan. “Reintegrating Rapid Appraisal Methodology in Social Science Research.” *Development* 11, no. 1 (2021).

Baas, Jeroen, Michiel Schotten, Andrew Plume, Grégoire Côté, and Reza Karimi. “Scopus as a Curated, High-Quality Bibliometric Data Source for Academic Research in Quantitative Science Studies.” *Quantitative Science Studies* 1, no. 1 (February 2020): 377–86. https://doi.org/10.1162/qss_a_00019.

Batsani-Ncube, Innocent. “Governing from the Opposition?’: Tracing the Impact of EFF’s ‘Niche Populist Politics’ on ANC Policy Shifts.” *Africa Review* 13, no. 2 (2021): 199–216.

Beebe, James. “Basic Concepts and Techniques of Rapid Appraisal.” *Human Organization* 54, no. 1 (1995): 42–51.

Chen, Martha, Michael Rogan, and Kunal Sen. *COVID-19 and the Informal Economy: Impact, Recovery, and the Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024.

Devereux, Stephen. “Social Protection Responses to COVID-19 in Africa.” *Global Social Policy* 21, no. 3 (December 1, 2021): 421–47. https://doi.org/10.1177/14680181211021260.

DSD. “ Integrated Service Delivery Model. ,” 2006.

———. “ ParentText Launches in South Africa! ,” 2022.

———. “ The Rapid Assessment of the Implementation and Utilisation of the Special COVID-19 SRD Grant. ,” 2021.

———. “The Rapid Assessment of the Implementation and Utilisation of the Special COVID-19 SRD Grant,” 2021.

DSD (Department of Social Development). “Summary Report on the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare 1977,” 2016. https://www.socialserviceworkforce.org/system/files/resource/files/Summary Report on the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare%2C 1997.pdf.

Fouksman, E., and H. J. Dawson. “Redistributive Politics and the Temporalities of Crisis: Reconfiguring Social Protection in a Post-Pandemic South Africa.” *Global Social Policy* 24, no. 2 (August 30, 2024): 242–60. https://doi.org/10.1177/14680181231201493.

Fourie, Pieter, and Guy Lamb. *The South African Response to COVID-19*. London: Routledge, 2023. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003294931.

GDSD (Gauteng Department of Social Development). *Gauteng City Strategy on Adult Street Homelessness 2020-2024*, 2021.

Gray, Mel, and Antoinette Lombard. "Progress of the Social Service Professions in South Africa's Developmental Social Welfare System: Social Work, and Child and Youth Care Work." *International Journal of Social Welfare* 32, no. 4 (October 10, 2023): 429–41. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.12562.

Gronbach, Lena. "South Africa's Social Protection Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic," 2021.

Gronbach, Lena, Jeremy Seekings, and Vayda Megannon. "Social Protection in the COVID-19 Pandemic: Lessons from South Africa." *Center for Global Development Policy Paper* 252 (2022).

Harker, Nadine, Kim Johnson, Jodilee Erasmus, and Bronwyn Myers. "COVID 19—Impact on Substance Use Treatment Utilization and Provision in South Africa." *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy* 17, no. 1 (December 3, 2022): 15. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13011-022-00446-6.

Human, L., M. Kimberly, M. Mafata, and L. Dyongman. "Long Queues at Post Offices as Activists Picket for COVID-19 Grant Extension," 2021.

IFSW. "The Role of Social Work in Social Protection Systems: The Universal Right to Social Protection," 2016.

IFSW Policy Paper. *The Role of Social Work in Social Protection Systems: The Universal Right to Social Protection*, 2016. https://www.ifsw.org/the-role-of-social-work-in-social-protection-systems-the-universal-right-to-social-protection/.

Kajiita, Robert Mutemi, and Simon Murote Kang'ethe. "Paradoxes of Social Grants in South Africa: The Case of COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant." *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 5, no. 7 (July 2, 2024): 1133–45. https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.2024577.

Kajiita, Robert Mutemi, and Simon Murote Kang'ethe. "The Dynamics Embedded in COVID-19 Pandemic Responses in South Africa: Implications for Public Healthcare Delivery." *Interdisciplinary Journal of Sociality Studies* 4 (May 28, 2024): 1–16. https://doi.org/10.38140/ijss-2024.vol4.09.

Köhler, Timothy, and Haroon Bhorat. "Can Cash Transfers Aid Labour Market Recovery." *Evidence from South Africa's Special COVID-19 Grant*, no. 202 (2021): 429–41.

Leonardsen, Dag. "Empowerment in Social Work: An Individual vs. a Relational Perspective." *International Journal of Social Welfare* 16, no. 1 (January 5, 2007): 3–11. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2397.2006.00449.x.

Lombard, A. "The Impact of Social Welfare Policies on Social Development in South Africa: An NGO Perspective." *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* 43, no. 4 (June 27, 2014). https://doi.org/10.15270/43-4-260.

Lombard, Antoinette. "The Implementation of the White Paper for Social Welfare: A Ten-Year Review." *The Social Work Practitioner-Researcher* 20, no. 2 (2008): 154–73.

Mahlangu, P., Gibbs, A., Shai, N., Machisa, M., and Skweyiya, Y. " Impact of COVID-19 Lockdown and Link to Women and Children's Experiences of Violence in the Home in South Africa. ." *BMC Public Health*, 22, no. 1029 (2022): 1–11.

Mahlangu, P, A Gibbs, N Shai, M Machisa, N Nunze, and Y Sikweyiya. "Impact of COVID-19 Lockdown and Link to Women and Children's Experiences of Violence in the Home in South Africa." *BMC Public Health* 22, no. 1 (December 21, 2022): 1029. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-13422-3.

Maki, Mzoxolo. *Addressing Poverty in South Africa: An Investigation of the Basic Income Grant*. University of Pretoria (South Africa), 2009.

Moses, Eldridge, and Ingrid Woolard. "The Role of Temporary Social Grants in Mitigating the Poverty Impact of COVID-19 in South Africa." *The South African Response to COVID-19: The Early Years. New York: Routledge*, 2023, 156–77.

Muleya, Emmison. "Developmental Social Work and the Sustainable Development Goals in South Africa: Opportunities and Challenges." *The International Journal of Community and Social Development* 2, no. 4 (December 4, 2020): 470–86. https://doi.org/10.1177/2516602620975226.

Naicker, Sara, and Linda Richter. “Parenting amid COVID-19: Challenges and Supports for Families with Young Children in South Africa.” *South African Journal of Child Health* 16, no. 1 (2022): 45–51.

Ncube, Mpumelelo. “Social Development in Southern Africa in the Wake of COVID-19.” *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* 60, no. 1 (2024). https://doi.org/10.15270/60-1-1249.

Noyoo, Ndangwa. “South Africa’s Social Policy Response to Covid-19: Relief Measures in an Unequal Society,” 2021. https://media-api.suub.uni-bremen.de/api/core/bitstreams/fd6a0c7c-b876-4d86-84eb-205430ae1749/content.

Parakozov, S. “Homelessness a Hot Potato for the City and NGOs. ,” 2023.

Patel, L., J. Triegaardt, and N. Noyoo. “ Developmental Social Welfare Services.” In *Social Welfare, and Social Development*, edited by L. Patel. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Patel, Leila, Viwe Dikoko, and Jade Archer. “Social Grants, Livelihoods and Poverty Responses of Social Grant Beneficiaries in South Africa.” *Johannesburg: Centre for Social Development in Africa, University of Johannesburg. December* 9 (2023): 2023.

Piketty, Thomas. *The Economics of Inequality: Harvard University Press*. Harvard University Press, 2015.

Republic of South Africa. “National Development Plan 2012.National Development Plan 2030: Our Future Makes It Work,” 2012. https://www.gov.za/documents/national-development-plan-2030-our-future-make-it-work.

Riggs, Erin Rooney, Erica F. Andersen, Athena M. Cherry, Sibel Kantarci, Hutton Kearney, Ankita Patel, Gordana Raca, et al. “Technical Standards for the Interpretation and Reporting of Constitutional Copy-Number Variants: A Joint Consensus Recommendation of the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics (ACMG) and the Clinical Genome Resource (ClinGen).” *Genetics in Medicine* 22, no. 2 (February 2020): 245–57. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41436-019-0686-8.

Roets, Leon, Annali Botha, Minrie Greeff, Sarie P. Human, Herman Strydom, Martha J. Watson, and Shingairai Chigeza. “A Synthesis of Homelessness in South Africa: A Rapid Critical Appraisal.” *Development Southern Africa* 33, no. 5 (September 2, 2016): 613–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2016.1203756.

RSA. “ White Paper for Social Welfare. ,” 1997.

———. “Constitution of South Africa. Act 108 of 1996,” 1996.

———. “National Development Plan 2012. National Development Plan 2030: Our Future Makes It Work. ,” 2012.

———. “Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004.,” 2004.

Schotte, Simone, Rocco Zizzamia, and Murray Leibbrandt. “A Poverty Dynamics Approach to Social Stratification: The South African Case.” *World Development* 110 (October 2018): 88–103. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.05.024.

Scully, Ben. “South Africa’s Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic: The Crisis in the Context of the History of South African Capitalism.” Working Paper, 2023.

Senona, Engenas. “South Africa Desperately Needs Basic Income Support, Now More than Ever Before.” *New Agenda: South African Journal of Social and Economic Policy* 78 (2020).

Shenderovich, Yulia, Hlengiwe Sacolo-Gwebu, Zuyi Fang, Jamie Lachman, Lucie Cluver, and Catherine Ward. “Adaptations and Staff Experiences in Delivering Parenting Programmes and Other Family Support Services in Three Community-Based Organisations in Cape Town, South Africa during the COVID Pandemic.” *Global Public Health* 18, no. 1 (January 2, 2023). https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2022.2129725.

Sonko-Najjemba, R, R Mataboge, T Lelaka, N Kamoga, T Chabawarwa, P Oladokun, G Sonko, J Cindi, and C Mtoba. “An Assessment of the Needs of Homeless People in Gauteng Province, in the Context of COVID-19.” *Strategic Analytics and Management (Pty) Ltd. Report for Gauteng Department of Social Development*, 2021.

Tihelková, Alice. “Framing the ‘Scroungers’: The Re-Emergence of the Stereotype of the Undeserving Poor and Its Reflection in the British Press.” *Brno Studies in English* 41, no. 2 (2015): 121–39.

https://doi.org/10.5817/BSE2015-2-8.
Triegaardt, Jean D. “Social Policy Domains: Social Welfare and Social Security in South Africa.” *International Social Work* 45, no. 3 (May 1, 2002): 325–36. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872802045003359.
Vetten, Lisa. “The Impact of the COVID-19 Lockdown on Domestic Violence in South Africa: What Do We Know.” *Research Brief* 1 (2021): 1–16.
Yingi, Edwin, Tomy Ncube, and Everisto Benyera. “Situating Dashed Prospects of Independence into the Xenophobic Narrative in South Africa.” *Journal of Black Studies* 55, no. 1 (2024): 68–89.

ABOUT AUTHORS

Emmison Muleya, Lecturer, Department of Social Work, School of Human and Community Development, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. His research interests are in social development, social policy, social protection and developmental states.

Mzukisi Xweso, Senior Lecturer, Department of Social Work, and affliated to Lifestyle Diseases Research Entity, North-West University, Mafikeng, South Africa. His research interests are in informal economy, social protection, school social work.