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Scales of ideational policy influence: A multi-level, actor-centric, and institutionalist perspective on the role of ideas in African social policy

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Abstract

Although there is a growing literature on transnational ideational processes in sub-Saharan Africa, the linkages between local, national, and transnational actors and ideas in African social policy would gain from more systematic mapping. In this paper, we explore what we call the "scales of ideational policy influence" by sketching a multi-level, actor-centric, and institutionalist perspective on ideational policy influence at the local, national, and transnational scales. This discussion leads to analysis of how these scales interact in terms of specific ideas and how both governmental and non-governmental actors seek to impact social policy decisions in sub-Saharan Africa. To illustrate the three scales of ideational influence and their interaction, the paper turns to the making of poverty reduction policies in Ghana. We show how policy ideas move from the global level to a national and subnational level using ideational mechanisms aided by the institutional position of actors and material factors.

Introduction

In sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere around the world, the role of ideas is an increasingly prominent topic in social policy research (e.g., Blyth, 2002; Schmidt, 2008; Béland and Cox, 2011a; Foli, 2016; Haang'andu, 2019a; Lavers and Hickey, 2021). Simultaneously, there is a growing number of publications focussing on transnational ideational processes, with a focus on the potential linkages between local, national, and transnational actors (TNAs) and ideas in the politics of social policy (for an overview, see Agartan and Béland, forthcoming). While appreciating this theoretical background, this paper uniquely demonstrates how multi-level ideational interactions and influences non-linearly and iteratively operate in social policy development in sub-Saharan Africa, with transferable implications for other contexts. Using the example of Ghana, a decentralised unitary country, this paper explores what we call the "scales of ideational policy influence" by offering a multi-level, actor-centric, and institutionalist perspective on ideational policy influence at the local, national, and transnational scales. While this approach stresses the role of ideas and institutions, it also recognises the potential influence of material factors, especially financial incentives. More concretely, the main analytical question raised in this paper is the following: how do these three scales and the actors populating them interact at the ideational level, and how do these actors potentially impact social policy decisions in sub-Saharan Africa? This unexplored approach gives us another angle to understanding the development and implementation of social policy in sub-Saharan Africa.

This special issue paper focusses on recent poverty reduction efforts in Ghana to map the scales of ideational influence in social policy development. In this case, we demonstrate the interaction of multi-level scales of ideational influence in the design and implementation of the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme in Ghana. The selection of Ghana as a case study is due to its unique position in the sub-region especially regarding its interaction with international financial institutions (IFIs) and other external actors in the policy process. Since it returned to constitutional rule in 1993, Ghana has initiated policies and programmes influenced by multiple internal and external actors and institutions. It is considered one of the top reformers in Africa, a trailblazer, and the "star pupil" of the IFIs (Hutchful, 1995; Dash, 2022). However, this is not the only level where national policies are shaped. Both local and TNAs as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in contemporary African play vital roles in the policy process, and specifically in Ghana's social policy development beyond IFIs' conditionalities. Consequently, it is particularly appropriate to stress the complex, multi-level nature of ideational policy influence in that country while drawing on recent ideational research about both Ghana and other countries in Africa (e.g., Foli, 2016; Haang'andu, 2019b; Ulriksen, 2019; Lavers and Hickey, 2021; Kpessa-Whyte and Tsekpo, 2022). Focussing on Ghana, an ethnically diverse unitary state, also means that our theoretical perspective equally applies to countries that are not federal states, in which the existence of multi-level politics and governance is rendered explicit by their very constitutional design. Although located in the West African sub-region, lessons on the ideational influence on policy making can be drawn and applied to other countries in the continent and around the world.

Methodological framework

Methodologically, this is a qualitative case study with information drawn from both primary and secondary sources. Semi-structured interviews with purposely selected governmental officials (from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the National Development Planning Commission, and Ministry of Finance), TNAs, and civil society actors provided the primary source of data (see Appendix for a list of interviewees and government publications). These interviews were conducted in Ghana, first in 2013 and then in 2023. Secondary data were largely drawn from government publications, news articles, published journal articles, and books on the subject. Using a process tracing approach, we identified the multi-level influence of ideas from the transnational level through to the subnational units.

The rest of this paper is divided into three main sections. The first main section draws on the international and comparative literature on the role of ideas to outline a multi-level, actor-centric, and institutionalist perspective on ideational policy influence. The subsequent section turns to the case of poverty reduction in Ghana. The last section stresses the analytical contribution of our perspective to multi-level ideational policy influence before explaining its transferability to both other African countries and other continents.

Theoretical framework: A multi-level, actor-centric, and institutionalist perspective

Ideas are historically contingent and particular meanings that shape the ways in which individual and collective actors understand the world in which they operate (e.g., Kingdon, 1984; Hall, 1993; Stone, 1997; Blyth, 2002; Béland, 2005; Jacobs, 2009; Mehta, 2011). Ideas represent the challenges and opportunities actors face, and the potential policy solutions at their disposal, which are themselves ideas, at least before they are institutionalised through concrete programmes (Parsons, 2007; Béland and Cox, 2011b). Yet, to study ideas, one has to clearly define what they are (Berman, 2013) before breaking them down into different subcategories (Béland and Waddan, 2015), which explains why typologies of ideas are so helpful (e.g., Campbell, 2004; Mehta, 2011).

In this paper, we follow a long intellectual tradition by defining ideas as causal beliefs that provide cognitive and normative road maps to actors, which help them to make sense and navigate the world in which they live and, more specifically here, the social policy challenges and options at hand (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993; see also Béland and Cox, 2011a). According to Campbell (2004), as normative

and/or cognitive elements, ideas are either located in the foreground or the background of policy debates. On the one hand, policy paradigms (i.e., assumptions that help experts formulate responses to specific policy challenges: Hall, 1993) and public sentiments (i.e., beliefs held by the public) are located in the background of these debates (Campbell, 2004). On the other hand, programmes (i.e., concrete ideas that "chart a clear and specific course of action") and frames (i.e., "symbols and concepts" used in public discourse to justify certain actions and proposals) are located in the foreground of such debates (Campbell, 2004, p. 94). Importantly, such ideas do interact with other factors and, taking this seriously, much of the ideational scholarship in public and social policy have long focussed on the relationship between ideas and institutions (e.g., Hall, 1989; Blyth, 2002; Campbell, 2004; Béland, 2005; Schmidt, 2008; Padamsee, 2009). Finally, one of the most crucial aspects of the contemporary scholarship on the role of ideas concerns the emphasis placed on the agency of individual and connective actors (Parsons, 2007; Béland and Cox, 2011a). This has led ideational scholars to stress the importance of studying specific ideas as they relate to, and are carried by, concrete actors (Campbell, 2004).

Considering the actor-centric nature of contemporary ideational analysis in social and public policy, much attention has been paid to the geographical and institutional location of individual and collective actors involved in the politics of ideas. For instance, while the early international literature on the role of ideas (e.g., Kingdon, 1984; Stone, 1997) embraced methodological nationalism and focussed primarily or even exclusively on national policy actors as "self-contained entities" driven mainly by domestic factors (Rosenberg, 2016, p. 19), a more recent stream of scholarship has paid systematic attention to transnational ideas and the actors seeking to diffuse them (Stone et al., 2020). This perspective is consistent with global social policy as a general approach (e.g., Deacon, 2007; Mahon and McBride, 2008; Kaasch and Stubbs, 2014; Clarke et al., 2015; Agartan and Béland, forthcoming), including the scholarship on the "politics of scale" (Stubbs, 2005; Deacon and Stubbs, 2013) and, more specifically, the emphasis of some of the recent scholarship on sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Kpessa and Béland, 2013; Foli, 2016; Wireko and Béland, 2017; Haang'andu, 2019a; Lavers and Hickey, 2021; Seekings, 2021).

Illustrative of this broad and rich intellectual tendency is the work of Orenstein (2008), who explains how international organisations like the World Bank (WB) interact with national political actors to promote the diffusion of their ideas about pension reform in different countries around the world. International organisations, as well as transnational policy consultants, have to collaborate with national actors who, because of their formal institutional position, are the only ones capable of implementing policy domestically. At the same time, as Campbell (2004) argues, the transnational diffusion of policy ideas in specific countries typically require national actors to adapt policy through translation processes (on translation, see also Clarke et al., 2015). These processes are about recasting ideas so that they "fit" well in the particular cultural and institutional context at hand. This is the case all over the world, including and especially in sub-Saharan Africa (Haang'andu and Béland, 2020; Seekings, 2021).

This paper demonstrates that when discussing the geographical and institutional scales of ideational influence, scholars cannot simply focus on TNAs as they interact with national actors. Similarly, in Africa as elsewhere, actors operating at the subnational level are also directly involved in the politics of ideational influence over social policy (Agartan and Béland, forthcoming). The paper shows that while the transnational level is heterogeneous and features global as well as regional players, the subnational level is itself geographically and institutionally stratified in ways that vary from country to country depending on their constitutional and historical makeup. This is the case in both federal countries and unitary states, as formal and informal boundaries exist between provincial and local entities.

Beyond these distinctions, it is clear from the literature that social policy is not only about transnational and national actors because subnational actors often play a crucial role in social policy development and implementation. Examples of local and municipal actors illustrate this claim (Kazepov et al., 2022; on the role of ideas in local governance, see Bradford, 2016). In sub-Saharan Africa and in other parts of the Global South, the influence of local actors in the politics of ideas becomes very clear when considering the role of street-level bureaucrats in policy implementation. Likewise, local NGOs are also actors that play a direct role in social policy implementation, both in terms of formal and informal social protection (Mumtaz, 2022). This is why paying attention to the ideas of people who run these NGOs at the local level is helpful to understand the politics of social policy in sub-Saharan Africa (see Ohemeng, 2015).

Our approach espouses a bottom-up ideational diffusion that demonstrates that social policy influence starts from the perspective that existing domestic institutions affect the behaviour of these actors, the structuration of these geographical scales and their interactions over time. As Orenstein (2008) shows, the interaction between national and TNAs, within a country's political institutions allocate power resources to specific actors, who have the formal legislative and policy leverage that other actors within the same political system do not possess (on this broad issue, see Robinson and Acemoglu, 2012, pp. 45–47).

In the Africa context, this institutionalist perspective on ideational influence leads us to pay close attention to political institutions like the presidency, partisan politics, the territorial distribution of power (level of decentralisation as well as the distinction between unitary state and federal state). We also focus on the ways in which existing policy legacies shape the relationship between public and private (not-for- and for-profit) providers of social protection over time (Kpessa and Béland, 2013). Our approach shows that these complex institutional configurations are part of the broader context in which we should study ideational influence over social policy as well as the actors involved in it. Following Agartan (2020), we recognise that both the agency of these actors and the institutional and/or geographical constraints and opportunities they face are crucial factors at hand. This recognition is a key feature of our proposed multi-level, actor-centric, and institutionalist perspective on the politics of ideas surrounding social policy in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond. This approach is similar to, and fully compatible with, multi-level governance but it is distinct from most versions of it because of its explicit emphasis on the role of ideas (for an articulation of ideational analysis and multi-level governance, see Theobald, 2011; Smith, 2022).

Finally, although our approach emphasises the role of institutions, we do recognise that they interact with material factors (Foli, 2023). Institutional factors include the position of TNAs with expertise in specific areas as members of sector working groups, technical committees, and or consultants; and transnational consultative meetings such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s Article IV consultations with member countries. Due to resource constraints in developing countries, material factors mainly refer to financial incentives that bolster TNAs policy positions. Financial assistance is usually premised on the adherence of some conditionalities, which are from the perspective of ideational studies policy ideas. In other instances, transnational policy actors could invest in promoting specific policy instruments such cash transfers by sponsoring conferences, seminars, field trips and even supplying technical experts or consultants to countries (Foli et al., 2018; Adesina, 2020). Thus, TNAs especially those with resources can push specific policy ideas backed by material resources (Foli, 2023). The next section explores our case study on poverty reduction in Ghana. The discussion goes beyond demonstrating that ideas matter to explain particular policy outcomes because this is already clear from the existing ideational literature (e.g., Campbell, 2004; Parsons, 2007; Jacobs, 2009; Béland and Cox, 2011b; Mehta, 2011). Instead, the objective of the case study is to illustrate the relevance of our multi-level institutionalist perspective for the study of ideational influence in social policy in sub-Saharan Africa. The case study uses a process tracing approach (Collier, 2011) to identify the main transnational, national and subnational actors involved in the country and the social policy subfield under consideration before exploring their institutionally located interaction in the production of concrete ideational policy influence. This shows how policy ideas from the transnational level affects national and sub-national policies and programmes. It also demonstrates that policy ideas can travel from sub-national contexts and become globally accepted instruments like cash transfers as a means of poverty reduction, which began in some Latin American countries and spread to other developing countries through TNAs.

Case study: Poverty reduction in Ghana

National policy context

Ghana, located in the West Africa subregion of sub-Saharan Africa, gained her independence in 1957 from the British. The country is a unitary state with a central government, and 16 regions, which are

further divided into districts in a decentralised governance system. At the central government level, policymaking involves national veto policy actors as well as other non-veto actors such as development partners (DPs) and civil society organisations, which seek to influence policies. The regions have regional coordinating councils (RCCs), which work with the district assemblies (DAs). Comprising partly elected (two-thirds of the total membership is elected on a non-partisan basis) and partly appointed (30% is appointed by the central government in consultation with traditional authorities and civil society organisations) members, the DAs are tasked with legislative, executive, planning, and developmental functions generally. The subnational units (particularly the DAs) are endowed with devolved power to perform administrative and policymaking functions, generate revenue and undertake developmental projects (Ayee, 2003). It is noteworthy that the modern form of political institutions coexists with traditional political authority (Boakye and Béland, 2019).

Poverty has been a perennial problem in Ghana. At independence, nationalist leaders, including Kwame Nkrumah and others who came after him, argued that the eradication of poverty was pivotal to the country's quest for nation-building and development (Nkrumah, 1957; Garba, 2007). Based on nationalist leaders' ideational conviction that social policy was vital for development and poverty reduction, significant socio-economic investment was made. The focus on social policy was, however, impacted negatively by political instability (from 1966 to 1992) and economic crises, which necessitated the 1980s structural adjustment and economic recovery programmes backed by the WB and the IMF (Loxley, 1990). The structural adjustment and economic recovery programmes, representing transnational ideas and their causal effects on national policy choices, prescribed a "market logic" approach: downsizing government, a full-scale economic liberalisation, and reduced role for the state in social policy (Williamson, 1993; Hutchful, 1994; Adésínà, 2009). Through the IMF/WB's ideational persuasion, access to health, education, and other social programmes was reduced significantly impacting the social fabric (Jolly, 2012; Ibrahim et al., 2016). The WB responded with a new ideational intervention, the Programme of Action to Mitigate the Social Costs of Adjustment (PAMSCAD).

Notwithstanding these interventions, between 1991 and 1992, 51% of the population was described as poor while the extreme poor were a little over 36% (Ghana Statistical Service, 2000). When the fourth republic was inaugurated in 1993, several social programmes were implemented towards poverty reduction. Initially, the programmes aimed at eliminating spatial inequalities, building capacity, promoting girl child education and free compulsory universal basic education (Republic of Ghana, 1995). The 2000s saw an increasing shift to the social protection paradigm in tandem with global trends initiated through the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPCs) initiative and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the preference for conditional cash transfer (CCT) programmes (Adesina, 2011, 2020; Foli, 2023). In 2003, Ghana introduced a National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) with exemptions for the most vulnerable to promote access to healthcare. Likewise, a number of programmes were introduced to make education accessible and promote human capacity development including the capitation grant, which provided tuition-free basic education and the Free Senior High School programme (Ministry of Education, 2018; Kale-Dery, 2020). Besides these programmes, Ghana implemented a cash transfer programme – the LEAP – in 2008 to help lift the extreme poor and vulnerable from poverty.

In tackling the challenge of poverty reduction in Ghana, one can identify various ideational processes and actors across multi-levels of engagement: transnational, national, and subnational. Policy making in Ghana, like most developing countries, is subject to several scales of ideational influences. The scales of ideational influence are discussed subsequently using the country's adoption of the LEAP cash transfer programme and the decision to join the HIPC initiative as cases.

Transnational level

At the transnational level, policy ideas transcend borders through TNAs including IFIs, international governmental and non-governmental organisations, civil society organisation and individuals. These actors adopt several ideational mechanisms to shape national policies. Specifically, in the case of

developing countries' relations with IFIs, policy ideas such as conditionalities have mostly been employed to shape policy significantly as was seen with the IMF and WB's structural adjustment and economic recovery programmes of the 1980s (Hutchful, 2002). These policy ideas, described as the Washington Consensus (Williamson, 1993) pushed the market logic using a carrot and stick approach, which resulted in significant policy reforms including market liberalisation (and in later years political liberalisation) across various developing countries. For instance, in 1983, Ghana adopted and implemented a structural adjustment and economic recovery programme instigated by the WB and IMF, which introduced service charges and aimed to broadly streamline government expenditure. Yet, as shown in later studies, conditionalities are not the only ideational mechanisms of influencing policy; ideas are also employed (Foli and Béland, 2014; Foli, 2023). TNAs diffuse several policy and programmatic ideas by acting as proposal actors[1] (Orenstein, 2008; Béland and Orenstein, 2013) or instrument constituencies[2] (Béland et al., 2018; Foli et al., 2018).

TNAs' roles as proposal actors and instrument constituencies became central from the mid-to-late 1990s, in a context of growing debt crisis in developing countries and the negative impact of structural adjustment programmes across the Global South which affected social spending. This situation energised a global campaign – Jubilee 2000 – to cancel developing countries' debt by the turn of the millennium (Pettifor, 2000). The IFIs established the HIPC's initiative in the late 1990s to help manage the debt crisis which required that countries meet some thresholds to qualify for debt relief including the formulation of a poverty reduction strategy paper. This dovetailed the campaign of the Jubilee 2000 group.

At the same time, there was also a shift towards greater focus on poverty reduction, which gained traction with the establishment of the global development agenda – the MDGs. Through the poverty reduction strategy papers, poverty reduction was pushed on all fronts by multilateral and bilateral actors globally. Within this sphere, social protection became a popular policy ideational tool as particular poverty reduction programmes (such as cash transfers) were promoted as solutions to poverty (Adesina, 2020). In this bid, TNAs such as the WB facilitated knowledge sharing among countries through field trips, conferences, and research publications. For instance, the WB organised three conferences in 2002, 2004, and 2006 on CCTs to share the experiences of implementing countries.

National level

Policy ideas and instruments developed by TNAs such as the Jubilee 2000 group, the WB, and IMF among others at the transnational level impact national policies through various means as discussed here creating linkages between the transnational and national policy spheres. In most cases, the search for solutions begins with a crisis, which leads national actors to IFIs as was the case with the adoption of structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s and HIPC in the late 1990s to early 2000s (Adésínà, 2009). However, transnational policy impact is not limited to the adoption of conditionalities espoused by the IFIs. Interactions at the global level among nations (either bilateral or multilateral) through conferences, seminars, and workshop serve as knowledge sharing hubs, where policy ideas are actively promoted (Béland et al., 2018). Such policy ideas subsequently become national policies through the activities of TNAs, who serve as DPs, and technical experts within countries.

Even though extreme poverty in Ghana was reduced from over 36% in 1992 to about 27% in 1999, poverty remained high. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), the situation was dire such that "… over one quarter of the Ghanaian population [were] unable to meet their basic nutrition needs, even if they devoted their entire budget to food" (Ghana Statistical Service, 2000, p. 10). Due to the debt burden, the government (National Democratic Congress – NDC) at the time was

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[1]While lacking formal veto power in national policymaking, proposal actors influence policymaking by putting forward various policy and programmatic ideas targeted at national veto players (Orenstein, 2008).

[2]Instrument constituencies are networked, collective policy actors tied to specific policy instruments who promote such policy tools through various means, both internationally and domestically (Voss and Simons, 2014; Béland and Howlett, 2017).

contemplating taking up the WB/IMF's HIPCs initiative and had developed an interim poverty reduction strategy document as noted by the former Finance Minister. Within this context, a new government was elected in 2001. The question of whether or not to join the HIPCs initiative became a terrain for political contest among domestic actors, but this contest also witnessed significant transnational involvement persuading policy actors to adopt this policy initiative (Foli, 2023). A faction of domestic political actors vociferous among them the NDC (which is now in opposition) was against joining the initiative, arguing that declaring a country HIPC gave it a negative connotation as one that was bankrupt (Republic of Ghana, 2001). Still, others were considering bilateral relations (especially with Japan) that could be affected by the decision to join the bandwagon. The contest among domestic actors was layered with significant ideational persuasion from multilateral and bilateral partners including Canada, Britain, and the WB who supported Ghana joining the HIPCs initiative, making favourable gestures such as Canada declaring the country's debt forgiven pending the decision (Business News, 2001).

HIPC was subsequently adopted, and Ghana prepared two poverty reduction strategy papers: Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy 2003–2005 (GPRS I) and Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy 2006–2009 (GPRS II) per the imposed policy conditionalities (Republic of Ghana, 2003, 2006). The HIPC initiative and the MDGs fed into the government's proclamation of a 'golden age of business' and private sector led development to reduce poverty. In pursuit of poverty reduction, the government pushed for availability of credit to the private sector especially small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). Within a global context that promoted microfinance as a means of growth and poverty reduction in the early 2000s, Ghana, likewise witnessed significant growth in microfinance. One of the social programmes recommended by the GPRS II in tackling the issue of poverty was a cash transfer programme. This policy idea was novel in the Ghanaian context and not easily accepted by most policy actors. How did this idea get to the attention of governmental actors?

Cash transfers were proposed by DPs belonging to the Vulnerability and Exclusion Sector Working Group (V&ESWG)[3] and by representatives of multilateral and bilateral agencies working in the social sector.[4] The working group is co-chaired by a representative from each of the two sides. The sector working groups provided a participatory interface between the government and DPs during the formulation of the poverty reduction strategy papers. An official of the development planning commission indicated concerning TNAs that "…they are integrated into the cross sectoral planning groups, they are not sitting outside waiting for us to finish before they make their inputs. They are part of the process" (Interview, 8 April 2013). Such forums also provided a means of transmitting policy ideas from the transnational to the national context. Accordingly, a member of the sector working group during an interview, indicated that the DPs pushed cash transfers on all fronts as noted, "DPs are ready to fund particular areas, and not other areas. For instance, I sat in the Vulnerability and Exclusion Sector working group…. It's all been about LEAP, and for those of us who work on vulnerability related issues you know that it is cross cutting…" (Personal interview, 19 April 2013) Subsequently, UNICEF and DFID (FCDO) facilitated the interaction of domestic policy actors with implementing countries through field trips to Brazil, supported capacity building activities and provided technical support towards the formulation and implementation of the programme (Foli, 2023). It is noteworthy that based on an collaborative arrangement with DFID and UNDP's International Poverty Center (IPC), Brazil supported programme development in Ghana by providing technical expertise. Moreover, TNAs are continually part of the policy process in their role as members of various working groups, which comprised DPs, CSOs, and government officials, and "they help in administering the program [LEAP]…their involvement depoliticises the program" (Personal interview with Official, 14 February 2023).

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[3]A group comprised of representatives from the government of Ghana social sector ministries (such as health; education; and gender, children and social protection).

[4]These include UNICEF, the WB, DFID (now called the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office [FCDO]), UNDP, the World Food Programme (WFP), the Luxembourg Social Trust, and the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Subnational level

In the policy making process, besides the national level of policymaking, Ghana's decentralised system recognises subnational levels in the policy process: the regional and district levels. These lower-level administrative and political units implement policy and programmatic ideas from the national level at the subnational level and engage in policy formulation (Republic of Ghana, 2016). The ideational influence of specific policy ideas from the transnational level is conveyed to subnational units through the national level in the formalised domestic policymaking process. When Ghana decided to join the WB/IMF HIPCs initiative, a participatory approach was adopted which involved both civil society actors and subnational units in the formulation process (Amoako-Tuffour, 2008). Regional-, district-, and community-level consultations were held, and the issues raised and suggestions made were relayed to the central-level sector working groups. Attempts to make the development of the GPRS participatory was in line with recommended best practices at the international level contained in the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF) designed by the WB and required by conditionalities attached to the HIPCs initiative (The World Bank, 2003). Country ownership was promoted as part of the CDF and became a feature of the formulation process of the poverty reduction strategy papers.

Besides policy formulation subnational units are also involved in the implementation of policies. With the LEAP programme, the Department of Social Welfare – Regional Directors of Social Welfare and District Social Welfare Officers, as well as District/Community LEAP Implementation Committees (D/CLIC) as well as traditional leaders are instrumental in facilitating its implementation (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP), 2020). Social welfare officers and D/CLIC members assist in sensitisation and dealing with cases, while third parties organisations are contracted to pay cash stipend and collect information on the poverty situation of various households using the proxy means test (PMT) questionnaire. Information generated from the PMT guides the selection of programme beneficiaries. Beneficiaries' welfare associations, which are formed in some communities, provide avenues of learning from each other on how to effectively manage the monies received. The activities of civil society actors are also witnessed across the three scales of ideational influence. Especially at the subnational level, "they monitor and advocate for the release of stipends to beneficiaries in a timely manner and sensitise recipients on their rights and responsibilities in light of the newly developed Beneficiary Charter of Rights and Responsibilities" (Interview, 21 July 2023).

Interactions

This paper finds that multiple scales of ideational influence underpinned the decision to join the HIPCs initiative, and the adoption of the cash transfer programme in Ghana. This finding builds on most ideational scholarship which acknowledges the significant role of ideas in shaping policy by stressing that ideas travel through several scales of influence. Policy ideas could travel from subnational or national levels to the transnational level and vice versa. At the transnational level, from the 1990s into the 2000s, there was a campaign for debt cancellation by CSOs led by the Jubilee 2000 group and growing drive towards poverty reduction with the establishment of the international development goals. The development of the HIPCs initiative by the IFIs aimed at debt relief and enhanced social spending but countries only qualified for the HIPC debt relief after meeting certain policy requirements such as maintaining macroeconomic stability and promoting polices or programmes geared towards poverty reduction and growth (IMF and WB, 2001). One of the policy instruments promoted towards poverty reduction in the early 2000s was CCTs. This programme implemented first in parts of Latin America was subsequently promoted by various TNAs such as the WB (organised conferences), DFID and the UNDP (through the IPC) in a knowledge sharing process. DFID and the IPC supported the formation of the "Brazil-Africa Cooperation Programme on Social Protection" which saw study tours to Brazil and provided technical assistance to African countries in the development of social protection programmes especially cash transfers (International Poverty Center, 2008). While these activities occurred within an international context

or at the transnational level, they were shaped by national-level conditions. The campaign for debt relief was due to the growing debt problems of developing countries. Within this context, social protection becoming a policy instrument of choice. It is noteworthy that TNAs such as international governmental and non-governmental organisations may prop up a national programme or draw lessons from a national programme to inform a transnational push for particular instruments, such as cash transfer programmes. Consequently, we see an overlap between the transnational and national levels.

In Ghana's context (national level), DPs/TNAs are members of the institutional framework which underpins policymaking, such as cross-sectoral planning groups and sector working groups. These institutional positions serve as platforms for influencing policy ideas, this then becomes part of the foreground policy debates (Campbell, 1998, 2004). As a result of their institutional positions, policy norms and ideas created at the global level are transmitted through these agents to governmental actors who are veto actors. In the case of LEAP, TNAs membership of the Vulnerability and Exclusion Sector Working Group provided a significant path in bringing transnational ideas to the national and subnational context.

Currently, the LEAP management committee includes representatives from civil society and DPs (FCDO, WB, UNICEF, and the European Union), while the secretariat also has technical assistants from the DPs (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP), n.d.). Besides such modes of interaction, policy ideas also travel through international conferences where experiences are shared. Between 2002 and 2006, the WB organised international conferences on CCT programmes implemented in Latin America. Some officials of the MoGCSP indicated that they were exposed to cash transfers through conferences and DP sponsored field trips. Within the framework of the Brazil-Africa Cooperation on Social Protection, officials from Ghana visited Brazil for study tours/field trips, where they were exposed to the programme and how it has worked practically in implementing countries. Accordingly, an official indicated that "[our development partners] sponsored trips to Brazil, where we learned a lot to shape our own program…and to conferences. Some officials from Brazil also came to Ghana to assist with program formulation…." Even after programme implementation, Ghana and other countries interact in a community of practice, where policy ideas are shared and implementing countries draw lessons from each other.

Besides, national policies may be influenced by other countries in the developing world in what is described as south–south cooperation, where countries at similar levels of development draw lessons from each other. Once transnational-level policy and programmatic ideas of poverty reduction are adopted at the national level, subnational units participate in the implementation of the policies and programmes. Policy ideas drawn from other contexts are also adapted to specific domestic environments. As noted by one of our previous informants, although in other countries, especially in Latin America, beneficiaries of cash transfers who flout the conditionalities are punished by withdrawing their benefits, in Ghana's case, the traditional authorities were brought in to advise and admonish beneficiaries. This demonstrates the importance of context in transnational policymaking and emphasises the agency of domestic actors in the policy development process.

Conclusion

The above case study illustrates the importance for students of social policy in Africa to pay close attention to the different scales of ideational influence and how the actors and ideas populating them interact over time. The case point to the added value of a theoretical perspective that combines a multilevel and actor-centric approach with an ideational perspective that pays close attention to institutional configurations but also recognises the role of material resources. More concretely, what the case show is that looking carefully at the interaction between subnational, national, and transnational ideas and between the governmental and non-governmental actors who carry them is useful to explain social policy stability and change in sub-Saharan Africa. Moreso, the ideational influence of TNAs goes beyond

the national level to the sub-national level. In some cases, lessons drawn from sub-national units can inform national policy and may travel to the transnational level.

Policy ideas on poverty eradication have been diffused to Ghana through two major routes: conditionalities and ideational mechanisms. In the case of Ghana's decision to join the HIPC's initiative, conditionalities determined by the IFIs were key paths to influencing policies and programmes. Beyond this, ideational mechanisms taking place at three different scales that interacted with one another have been significant in shaping policies and programmes. It is noteworthy that institutional positions (membership of various sector working groups) and platforms provided by conferences, seminars, and workshops are key routes of influencing Ghana's ultimate adoption of the LEAP across the three scales of ideational influence under consideration.

The role of transnational ideational influence through political and economic power in policy transfer is important. Differences in political and economic power between two policy parties (i.e., states) can be serious causes of ideological asymmetries and introduce perverse incentives for policy change. Not only could the dominant party succeed in policy change based on their ideological and normative terms, but the other party could be disposed more to ideological acquiescence than persuasion (Booth, 2011). Economic aid can play a significant role in the change of policy instruments, perhaps not as much in societal ideational disposition. Yet, economic incentives provide a potential explanation for why some countries accept policy proposals made by powerful economic and political forces. Therefore, beyond the much-celebrated political institutional engagement approach, social policy scholars have an important and urgent task to reconceptualise and ground transnational social policy with a multi-level, actor-centric, and institutionalist approach that centralises the role of ideas in multi-level ideational interactions.

Partly due to the limited space available, the case study discussed above do not provide a detailed demonstration of the potential empirical fruitfulness of our multiple scales of ideational perspective for the study of social policy in Africa and beyond. This is why the agenda for future research put forward here necessarily includes the need to look at more cases with greater detail. Regarding sub-Saharan Africa, these cases could feature other countries than Ghana while also perhaps turning to other aspects of social policy than poverty reduction. Beyond sub-Saharan Africa, the framework outlined previously should be useful to scholars working on social policy stability and change in other regions of the world. Empirical studies conducted in these regions would be helpful to assess whether this perspective can be used as is across bodies of work or whether it needs to be adapted to the specific context in which it is applied.

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APPENDIX

(a) Semi-structured interviews – List of respondents.[1]

Organisation	Number
1. Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection including specific units such as: the Department of Social Welfare and the LEAP Management Secretariat	Nine (9) officials were interviewed altogether. Of this, six (6) were interviewed in 2013 and three (3) were interviewed in 2023.
2. National Development Planning Commission	Two (2)
3. Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning	Two (2)
4. Members of Parliament	Four (4)
5. Civil Society Organisations (who work specifically in the field of social policy/social protection and or international organisations study – Social Enterprise Development Foundation (SEND-Ghana); the Ghana Trades Union Congress; Queenmothers Association (Manya-Krobo); HelpAge International – Ghana; Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC)	Five (5)
6. International Organisations (with offices in Ghana including UNICEF, WB, IMF; UNDP) and bilateral partners (Japan, Netherlands)	Six (6)
7. Academia – Centre for Social Policy Studies	One (1)
8. Individual government officials (who were no longer in active service at the time of the data generation exercise)	Three (3)

[1]Unless otherwise specified, this table mainly displays the list of interviewees for the 2013 data generation exercise. Information for the 2023 interviews are specified where appropriate.

(b) List of governmental publications consulted.

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2. Ministry of Education (2018) *Education Strategic Plan 2018–2030.* Accra: Ministry of Education.
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