Grandparents as parents: Skipped-generation households coping with poverty and HIV in rural Zambia
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Conclusion: Children and young people, older people and HIV in Zambia

Introduction

The objective of this research was to provide a comprehensive understanding of the changing dependency between orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) and their elderly caregivers living in skipped-generation households in Misangwa, Zambia. The study has presented findings on specific aspects of these households in order to provide such an insight. In this chapter, the main conclusions are presented.

Two main conclusions have been drawn and are presented in the following section. The first is that there is a general lack of knowledge about such households at the local, national and international levels. The second is that the formation of such households is often a last resort in the face of limited options, and as such can be seen as a crisis driven response.

In the third section, two conclusions are drawn concerning the older generation in skipped-generation households. The first is that these people’s unmet expectations of old age have many implications for their own well-being and the well-being of the younger generation living with them. The second is that their own well-being is compromised by their inability to adequately care for the younger generation, since the associated feelings of failure, frustration and hopelessness can cause a vicious circle of increased depression and destitution, and a reduced sense of well-being.
In the fourth section, which focuses on the younger generation living in skipped-generation households, three conclusions are drawn. The first is that children and young people are often poorly integrated (or even unknown) in the wider community. The second is that these children and young people must be the ‘messengers of their own development’, and they often need to search for support themselves. The third conclusion is that ‘deviancy’ among the younger generation can be seen to be beneficial, for the sake of their own well-being and that of their household.

In the fifth section, conclusions are drawn related to the theoretical framework. The first conclusion is that several findings can be directly related to the framework that was used for data collection and analysis, namely Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of child development, or the PPCT model. These include the observation of underdeveloped support structures (mesosystems) around children and young people and therefore the increased necessity for them to play the role of messenger of their own development.

In the last section of this chapter the future of skipped-generation households is considered, and some thoughts and expectations about what is likely to happen to the households studied in the years to come are presented. The final section is made up of three categories of recommendations that stem directly from this research.

General conclusions at the household level

Lack of knowledge and attention

At local, national, and international levels, there is little knowledge of, or attention given to, skipped-generation households. Indeed, the problems that these households face are often overshadowed by other, broader issues. But why are the problems surrounding skipped-generation households overshadowed and which issues overshadow them? Since 2009, the global budget for the fight against HIV/AIDS has decreased (UNAIDS 2010a: 146), meaning less available funds and altered spending patterns. Since the introduction of ART, priority has been given to the provision of these lifesaving drugs, at the expense of other activities such as prevention and mitigation programmes.

The reduced spending on mitigation programmes in particular has had dire consequences for those who have been affected by (rather than infected with) HIV. Orphaned children and young people and the elderly living in skipped-generation households are among the most affected by the epidemic. They do not need drugs, but they do need food, shelter, and educational support. The spread of HIV needs to be halted, lives need to be saved, and ART should be provided to all those who need it. But the reality is that many people have died and many
people will continue to die, leaving behind children and dependent relatives. These people must live with the impact of this loss, yet the major donors and the HIV/AIDS community seem to have forgotten about them.

At the local level, most people seem unaware of the problems that emerged through this study. For instance, while working with the research assistants in Misangwa, I came to understand that they knew very little about skipped-generation households. As they became involved in the research and started to visit these households, they told me how shocked they were by the suffering of the older people and orphaned children they met, and their shame about the fact that someone from Europe had to come to Misangwa to draw attention to their plight.

The policy documents produced by the Zambian government acknowledge the needs of specific vulnerable groups, including OVCs and the elderly, and internationally the government has committed itself to various agreements and made pledges. In policy documents, for instance, they refer to social protection and better access to services for these groups. Analysis of governmental budgets and spending, however, suggests that over the last decade they have prioritised other issues.

At the international level, changes in policies coupled with the worldwide economic crisis have led to decreased budgets for combating HIV/AIDS. The focus on successful treatment through ART has overshadowed funding needs for mitigation and prevention activities. This policy change is driven by the will to save lives but also by the lack of knowledge within international organisations about skipped-generation households. The limited cooperation between organisations such as UNFPA, UNICEF, UNAIDS and WHO limits the sharing of knowledge and inhibits the development of a more holistic approach to planning and spending.

The consequence of the lack of knowledge about skipped-generation households at all levels is that those living in such households do not receive the support they desperately need.

The formation of skipped-generation households

Researchers run the risk of forgetting what places with an HIV epidemic were like prior to the HIV crisis. Studying the older respondents’ life histories showed that mortality among middle-aged adults has always been substantial. Traffic accidents, diseases and infections, food shortages, natural disasters, and complications around pregnancy were all common causes of death. In the past, many older people lost their children, while many children and young people lost their parents.
In pre-HIV Misangwa, therefore, there were always many orphaned children. The numbers of children growing up without their parents were, nevertheless, much lower than today, and families were able to absorb these children into the network of relatives known as the extended family. This family network was so effective that many respondents said that there were no orphans in the past, by which they meant that there were no problems in caring for children who had lost their parents. HIV changed all of this, and as the number of orphans has increased, so have the problems in finding homes and guardians for them. The rise in the number of AIDS orphans has actually led to the more common use of the term orphans in the community.

In many ways it is logical that the old and the young live together in skipped-generation households. In fact, there are often no real alternatives. As middle-aged relatives started to die with greater frequency at the end of the 1980s, and the trend continued into the 1990s and 2000s, more and more children became orphaned. The traditional guardians of orphans – uncles, aunts and other ‘younger’ adults – were also disappearing, and where they were still present they were likely to be overburdened with the care of dependent relatives. The overwhelming number of orphaned children and young people requiring guardians, and the loss of support from their middle-aged children that older people experienced, brought the two groups together. Often this crisis driven response was without alternatives: the two groups could either live together, or they would be forced to live alone.

The objectives of guardians in fostering orphans have often been portrayed as purely altruistic and devoid of any evaluation of possible personal gain (see for example Nyamukapa & Gregson 2005). In the skipped-generation households that I studied this was not the case. As has been explained, the formation of these households is the result of the total lack of alternative fostering solutions within extended families. However, having said that this response is crisis driven, and therefore not a matter of choice or preference, does not mean that the actions of those involved are not at all driven by altruism. Even without the means to care for new members, all of the older heads of skipped-generation households indicated that they would still care for additional children. Their motivations to do this were love, family relatedness and religion.

Furthermore, the sustained cohabitation of the two generations over time can be understood, in part, to be the result of altruism on the part of the younger generation. As has been explained, children and young people living in skipped-generation households do sometimes consider leaving the household in search of greener pastures. Most decide to stay, however, because of their sense of responsibility towards their siblings and grandparents. In other cases, they simply may not know where else to go if they were to leave.
Finally, regarding the motivations that drive people to foster orphans, some authors have mentioned that guardians may personally benefit from additional resources (such as orphan support grants and government assistance) that might be associated with fostering (see for example Lindheim & Dozier 2007). Given that no such resources are available in Misangwa, such motivations among the older guardians were not found in the households studied.

Conclusions related to the older generation

*Unmet expectations of others and of old age*

Almost all members of the older generation in skipped-generation households explained how their expectations of old age were not being met. What they had hoped for and expected for their old age was very different from the lives they now lived.

- **What did they expect life to be like?**

During in-depth interviews, older people explained what they had hoped for in their old age. Their descriptions sounded almost romantic when they explained how they remembered older people when they were young. They saw how their own grandparents and other older people lived: in large villages surrounded by their children, grandchildren, and other family members. According to their recollections, the older people were not burdened with problems but were cared for. Children supported their parents while grandchildren kept them company. When older people lived in their own households, it was common for one or two grandchildren to live with them. Even then, these older people lived in the same village as some of their own children, and were thus supported and socially well integrated. The elderly were appreciated and respected members of the community, who would be consulted by their children and other community members for advice. Whether this description of older people’s lives is accurate or not, it describes the type of life that the present older generation had hoped for and expected.

- **Why have their expectations of old age not been met?**

There are a number of changes that have occurred that explain why the expectations of the older respondents for their old age have not materialised. One is the absence of their children and other middle-aged adults due to two demographic changes: migration and mortality.

Changes in migratory patterns over the last century were the result of various developments that caused numerous social transformations in Zambia. Industrial-
isation in the 1920s provided the first pull factors for migration, which in turn led to urbanisation. As was explained in Chapter Two, Zambia is one of the most urbanised countries in Africa. The life histories of the older respondents reflect the high mobility of people from rural to urban areas, as many of the respondents had spent part of their lives in towns. The picture that emerges from the sixty life histories that I collected among the older generation is that every generation has been more mobile than the one before it. The older people saw many of their children leave Misangwa and few of them have returned.

As has been noted in this study, many of those from the middle generation who did return to Misangwa came back because they were sick. Since the 1990s up to the present, many young people – both those who stayed in Misangwa as well as many of those who left – have died of HIV-related causes. For the older generation, the most important sources of support and company have thus either migrated away or passed away. In less than two decades, the older generation have found themselves heading households and caring for grandchildren, rather than being in the centre of, and being cared for by, their own children’s families.

As adult children have moved away and/or died and the care for dependent (grand)children has fallen to a smaller group of people, the available support within families has become increasingly overstretched. Dependency ratios have changed and the number of people available to support one another has decreased. More and more dependent people, such as OVCs and the elderly, have found themselves without the usual means of support, and thus groups of dependent people have become dependent on one another. This interdependence has led to the formation of skipped-generation households. The situation in these households is the exact opposite of the situation that the older respondents in this study had expected for their old age.

- What does it mean that expectations of old age have not been met?

Lack of support and loneliness were often mentioned by the older respondents living in skipped-generation households, as well as the comment that they felt that the hard work that they had done during their lives had been useless and had not paid off. One consequence of this was that they had lost their sense of confidence, and in many cases, they explained that this made them depressed.

The day-to-day reality of their lives is that meeting basic needs takes up all of their energy and motivation. Once they have done what they feel they can do in terms of securing food for the many hungry mouths in the household, many simply sit around. They spend a lot of time waiting: they wait for nightfall when they can go to sleep; they wait for a cup of mun’kayo beer to temporarily forget their problems; and they wait for someone to come to their rescue. More often
than not, it is only nightfall that comes, although the cup of *munkoyo* is a close runner-up.

Not having been granted the life that they dreamed of makes the older generation in such households sad and angry. They feel that an injustice has been done to them. Frustration is common and it comes with blaming those on whom they depend most. These frustrations impact the way in which they interact with the younger generation, which can lead to stress and conflict in the home. This in turn further increases their feelings of frustration and depression.

*Unfulfilled responsibilities as guardians*

According to the respondents, both young and old, life is most enjoyable when they can assume the social roles that belong to them; when the old can be grandparents and the young can be children. Most of the time, however, the social roles that these people are forced to play are different from what they would like their roles to be and what others expect their roles to be. In relation to social roles, two conclusions can be drawn.

The first is that being a guardian is not always compatible with being a grandparent. It is obvious that one person can be both, but to carry out both roles is difficult, and can lead to a great deal of stress and tension between the two generations. This is particularly true for children who knew their grandparents and spent time with them before their parents died. The treatment and atmosphere that they expected upon moving into their grandparents’ household is not what they actually encounter, and they said that they find it hard to accept the new role that their grandparents must play as their guardians. Over time, they learn to accept that their grandparents are now also their guardians, but many, at least initially, feel saddened and alienated.

The second finding is that grandparents are not able to meet their self-ascribed roles as guardians. What the older respondents said that they want to do for their grandchildren differed from what they are able to do. Nourishment, care, safe and adequate housing, education and clothing were among the things that the respondents felt that guardians should provide for children. Most, however, fail in this task. This failure compounds the older people’s sadness and frustration, and they thus feel guilty and powerless. These feelings negatively affect their well-being and self-efficacy and in some cases cause them to become depressed and to give up.

As was the case with the older generation’s unmet expectations for their old age, this self-perceived failure to fulfil their role as a guardian can also lead to a vicious circle. For instance, as older people’s sense of well-being decreases, the chances that they will resort to alcohol use as a way to escape their problems
increase; their productivity will in turn decrease, and they will become even less able to fulfil their responsibilities towards the younger generation in their care.

The children and young people living in skipped-generation households emphasised that they realised that their grandparents are trying their best, and they felt that there was no one to blame for their situation. They often said that blame or anger was not going to bring their parents back, and was therefore useless. Rather, the children said that hard work was their only chance to develop and improve their well-being. Many of the older people, on the other hand, no longer had the energy or perseverance to have this mind-set. As was mentioned earlier, many had lost their sense of self-efficacy and the conviction that hard work and determination could lead to change. This difference in attitude between children and their guardians was a further source of stress and conflict, and in many of the skipped-generation households studied, the generational gap between the old and the young had widened as a result.

Conclusions concerning the younger generation

Shifting roles: Receiving, providing and reciprocity

Parents or guardians provide and care for children. This widely held assumption often does not hold ground in low-resource settings, because children need to work for their households and families. In all households in Misangwa, it is normal for children to work. However, children growing up in skipped-generation households have more roles and responsibilities than children in other households. Not only do they do most (if not all) of the work in relation to income generation, and in many cases childcare, but the responsibility for caring for their older guardians also often falls on them. In skipped-generation households, the roles and responsibilities of children and young people were found to change according to two factors: the first was the age of the members of the younger generation; the second was the age of their guardians.

In the ‘ideal’ situation in the context of skipped-generation households, the role of children would change according to the following pattern. Very young children would carry few responsibilities, and would be cared for by their older guardians and the older children and young people in the household. As soon as the children would be able to carry some responsibility, they would do certain chores and join their household’s labour force. Initially, responsibilities would be limited to light work around the house and running errands. As they grew older, they would begin to work on the fields, work for cash for other households, and carry increasing responsibility to feed the household. They would eventually become responsible for the income generation of the household, and start to make the key decisions about farming and income. At this point, they would no
longer be being looked after by their guardians; rather, they would be the ones caring for and looking after their guardians. The role of the guardian would then be limited to showing affection and providing a binding factor in the home.

Examination of the continuum of care from the perspective of the younger generation shows that it begins with receiving care from other household members and ends with giving care. Between the beginning point and end point of the care continuum, the middle zone should be characterised by reciprocity. Thus even when guardians are extremely old and can no longer work, they should still be able to provide care in the form of love and affection. The reciprocal character of care comes under pressure, however, when old age is filled with depression, frustration, and feelings of having been wronged. When this happens to the older generation, the care transaction can lose its reciprocal nature and become one-directional.

Many members of the younger generation said that they were willing to accept that their guardians were old and destitute and that, as a result, they could not contribute much labour to the household. They often expressed understanding of the implications and frustrations of old age, and many thus explained that giving love and care without receiving anything back was acceptable for them. What they did find difficult to accept, however, was not that their guardian could not do much of the work around the house or on the fields, but that despite this they still wanted to make all the decisions related to farming and income generation. The respondents from the younger generation explained their frustration about this, which, they felt, hampered their opportunities for improving the household’s well-being and economic situation.

Many stories were shared about the negative role that some members of the older generation play within skipped-generation households. As they become older, some become more stubborn and less able to accept other’s views. Some of them, even though they cannot contribute to the household’s income generation activities, nevertheless refuse to let go of any decision making powers over such activities. When this happens, the older children and young people naturally become frustrated. In their view, they work hard and are willing to care for their grandparents without any ‘reward’. However, when they feel that their potential is being limited by their older guardians, yet they have no power to change it, they begin to consider more radical alternatives such as lying to or disregarding orders from their guardian, or in extreme cases leaving the household altogether.

The consequences of a young person leaving a skipped-generation household can be quite significant, as the household loses a productive household member in a position to help the overall well-being of all persons residing there. Only a small number of the respondents actually did leave the household. Those who did so explained that this was the only viable option that they felt they had left, given
the tensions between themselves and their guardian. It had been very difficult for them to do, as they felt responsible for their grandparent and the other children in the household.

Anonymity in the community

Children and young people in skipped-generation households are more anonymous in the community than other children because their guardians have fewer social relations and the households themselves are often geographically isolated. This anonymity is also the result of the minimal engagement of older guardians in the various microsystems of their grandchildren. What this exactly means in terms of the development of these children is difficult to say. It is clear that there are a number of consequences, the most important of which is the lack of involvement of significant others in the lives of the members of the younger generation in skipped-generation households.

The anonymity, lack of social control, and limited interference of adults in the lives of the younger generation in skipped-generation households could have the potential to allow these young people to ‘misbehave’. However, this was not found to be common. Many did share how they experienced peer pressure to do so – such as to frequent drinking places or smoke marijuana – but they claimed that they could manage this pressure by explaining their household responsibilities to their friends. Their responsibilities motivated many of them to do the right thing, even when there was no one to guide or punish them.

Furthermore, the lack of socialisation, a potential risk for children in skipped-generation households, was found to be less of a problem than one might expect. The children and young people acquired many social skills by living in skipped-generation households. They learned to adjust to changing social roles, navigate intergenerational differences, avoid conflict, care for others, mitigate stress, and show self-constraint. These skills required much more from them than from children in ‘normal’ households.

Despite their limited interactions and social participation outside of the home, they were therefore found to acquire a lot of experience at home. In addition, many of them did make contact with others outside of their household if they needed support, advice, permission, and so on. Approaching adults takes courage and belief in one’s own abilities. While life in skipped-generation households may be difficult, it seemed to equip children and young people with specific experiences and life skills. Having to fight for themselves and their siblings, and learning how to acquire beneficial social contacts, were important skills which would benefit them later in life.
Messengers of their own development

As we have seen, children and young people in skipped-generation households grow up in relative anonymity in their community, and their guardians are not likely to interact with significant others in their various Microsystems outside of the home. As a result, their mesosystems are underdeveloped – in the sense that there are extremely few linkages (if any) connecting the children’s various Microsystems to one another and to the children’s household/guardian – and this is more so than for the mesosystems of children and young people growing up in other types of households. One consequence of underdeveloped mesosystems is that children must be personally responsible for the communication between significant others in their lives. They need to be the messengers of their own development.

Children and young people in skipped-generation households need to communicate their well-being, successes, failures, and problems to the people in their different social settings. For example, it was found that there was almost no communication between their school setting and their guardians, and therefore the teacher could not ask the guardian to help the child with homework, nor could the guardian tell the teacher that the child was having difficulties at home that might keep him or her away from school. As there were few or no intense linkages between significant others in their lives, these children and young people could choose what information to share with whom and what information they wanted to withhold. For example, if their school report card was good, they would show it at home; if their grades were poor, they might choose not to mention it. Furthermore, if there was a problem at school and they needed extra help, they would have to ask for it themselves.

The data collected for this study shows how children and young people dealt with the responsibility of being the messengers of their own development. While some of the significant others in their lives could not be chosen (for example, guardians or teachers), in other areas they did have a lot of freedom to decide which people they interacted and engaged with. This freedom, which was enhanced by their relative anonymity, meant that they could choose to allow or disallow specific people involvement in their lives. They were strategic in their choices, engaging with people whose help or advice they wanted, while avoiding others.

Generally, the members of the younger generation in such households knew exactly to whom they could best turn and what they needed. They could plan their own development routes. Many of the younger people were good at this and were able to approach people who could have a strong positive influence on their development or could allow them to make money or grow more food. Neighbours were found to be very important, as were people with specific skills. Not
all respondents sought the involvement of others in their lives, but those who did so benefited from this, as did the other people in their households.

The benefits of ‘positive deviance’

In every community there are individuals and/or groups of people whose uncommon behaviours and actions enable them to find better solutions to problems, or to better mitigate negative impacts, than others just like them who have the same access to resources and face the same hardships. The individuals who do this can be termed ‘positive deviants’ and their actions ‘positive deviance’.

The members of the younger generation in skipped-generation households who exhibited deviant behaviour usually did so to improve their well-being. When they sought the advice of others, for example, they did so to gain support or knowledge that would help them to improve their farming outputs or income; when they hid money from their guardians, it was used to pay for education or food, or to purchase clothes for their younger siblings. In some cases, the young people argued that if they had not kept the money away from their guardian, it would perhaps have been spent on beer, and in this sense they had good reason to deviate from what was expected of them.

In the literature, positive deviance of children and young people is most often related to the role of parents and parenting styles. The work of Zeitlin, Ghassemi and Mansour (quoted in Zeitlin 1993) presents cross-cultural studies and literature reviews in developing countries on the growth and cognitive performance of children. They found that positive deviance manifests mostly among children whose parents:

… typically have superior mental health life satisfaction related to the child, greater upward mobility and initiative, and more efficient use of health, family planning, and educational services. They display favourable behaviours towards their children, such as rewarding achievement; giving clear instructions; frequent affectionate physical contact; and consistent, sensitive, and patiently sustained responsiveness to the children’s needs (ibid.: 63).

As has been mentioned, the situation in skipped-generation households in Misangwa was found to be characterised by poverty and depression of the elderly household heads and guardians. The parenting role assumed by these guardians can hardly be described as favourable, consistent or sustained. Positive parental roles and stimulating parenting styles do not therefore explain why these children deviated positively from the norm. Rather, their positive deviance can be seen as a response to improper (in the opinion of the children and young people) parenting behaviour, in particular to what they felt to be objectionable judgements and decisions. This brings us to the question of what, if not the positive characteristics of the guardians, explains why some children and young people displayed positive deviant behaviour, and why others did not.
Objecting to the decisions and behaviours of guardians might have been the trigger when positive deviancy occurred, but it does not explain the deviancy itself, since not all members of the younger generation who objected to their guardians acted in this way. The willpower, self-efficacy, and intelligence of the individual members of the younger generation better explain why some of them displayed positive deviancy. Those individuals who wanted to improve their own well-being and the well-being of those living with them, and who believed that they could do this, were likeliest to display such behaviour, no matter if it was socially unacceptable or contrary to the wishes of their guardians.

It is likely that the trigger for positive deviant actions lies in the day-to-day realities in skipped-generation households. The personal characteristics outlined above offer some explanation of why some engaged in such behaviour and some did not. The other explanation lies in the life histories of the children and young people. The experiences that they had before they came to live in skipped-generation households and the trauma that they experienced have helped them to ‘think outside of the box’. All of the younger respondents had lived through traumatic experiences, which had forced many of them to think and behave like adults. They had to care for their ill parents, they have faced parental death, they have had to care for their siblings like parents, and many have had to make decisions that most adults have never had to make. Their lives have been – and mostly still are – difficult, and they have had to assume roles and make decisions that have formed them and their personalities.

In a sense, therefore, their positive deviant behaviour is not something that is new for them, but is rather quite normal. Earlier in life they have been forced to act in ways that go against expectations for their age and social position, and so now they refuse to let other people, including their older guardians, make decisions for them; at least in cases where they strongly disagree with such decisions. Out of respect and love for their guardians, most of the younger generation living in skipped-generation households were willing to abide by set rules and appear to behave as expected of them. They were, however, not willing to follow instructions or tolerate behaviours that they felt were bad for them, for their siblings, or for the households in which they lived.

Conclusions and the theoretical framework

The consequence of using a specific framework for data collection and data analysis, in this case Bronfenbrenner’s ecological framework of child development, means that specific data has been collected and specific questions investigated. In this section I will discuss some of the conclusions that I was able to draw as a result of the investigation frameworks used.
The ecological approach and the data

The older generation in skipped-generation households was found to be more isolated than other older people in the community. They maintained significantly fewer relationships with people outside of their household than did others, and their interactions with these people were short and took up little time on a day-to-day basis (micro-time). Where interactions did occur between the older people and others outside of the household, these also took place less frequently and less regularly (meso-time) than was the case among other older people who did not live in skipped-generation households. Fewer interactions overall, and shorter and less frequent interactions where linkages existed, led to a situation where such interactions had little or no significant influence on the older people’s life courses (macro-time). In other words, the interactions with others became less important and less influential. For many of the older people, this meant that maintaining relationships with others was increasingly considered not worth the trouble and investment required. This caused further reduction in the number and intensity of social relations and compounded their isolation.

In many ways, the lack of social relations and the loneliness of the members of the older generation residing in skipped-generation households were found to influence the well-being and development of the younger generation. Across the board, this influence was more negative than positive. Their lack of social relationships had a negative impact on their well-being, which in turn influenced how they treated the children and young people in the home. A frequently observed situation was that older people felt alone and were of the opinion that they were not receiving the care and support to which they were entitled. As a result, they were disappointed and angry with those around them, including the children they were living with.

Another finding relates to the underdeveloped mesosystems of members of the younger generation growing up in skipped-generation households. It was found that many of the older respondents did not interact with other people who were part of the children and young people’s social settings outside of the home (microsystems other than the home setting). The older generation within the skipped-generation households in this study spent most of their days around the home and sometimes on the fields. Children and young people on the other hand also spent time at school, with neighbours, with peers and with other people in the wider community. Their older guardians, however, did not have contact with these people. Even in cases where the older people did have more frequent interactions with others outside of the home, their social settings (microsystems) were found to be different from the social settings of the children and young people. This meant that shared contacts were rare and therefore there was no communica-
tion between the guardians of the children and young people and the other people who were important in the children’s lives.

Such contacts between guardians and significant others in a child or young person’s life are important, and their absence can lead to the underdevelopment of children and young people’s mesosystems. For the younger people living in skipped-generation households observed in this study, these underdeveloped mesosystems meant that were not closely parented and had more freedom to do what they wanted when they were away from home. There was little or no interference in their lives by adults in the community, who either did not know who they were or had no contact with their guardians, both of which meant that they were relatively anonymous.

Members of the younger generation in skipped-generation households were observed to experience fewer and less intense interactions and relationships (proximal processes) with adults (other than their guardians) compared to children in other types of households. This is explained in part by the fact that their older guardians had fewer social relations and smaller social networks of their own. Children and young people are likely to have some interaction with the adults that are important to their parents or guardians. When guardians do not have relationships with others, this also means that the younger generation have less contact with other adults. In terms of interactions with others, the children and young people in this study could hardly benefit from their guardians’ social networks and were more dependent on their own social networks. These networks do not just exist, however; they need to be created. In this situation, it is thus up to the children and young people themselves to invest in and form social networks of their own.

Part of the gap in the social networks of both generations in skipped-generation households was found to be related to the church. In Misangwa, connections formed through the church are very important in people’s social surroundings. When older people are no longer able to go, the children and young people living with them are also less likely to attend. As people stop going to church, the relationships with others whom they know there begin to fade and their social networks slowly disappear. Spending less time with people at church (micro-time) and going to church less frequently or not at all (meso-time) means that the importance and impact of these relationships on a child’s development diminishes. In many cases, it was observed that this process continued to a point where people from church, who were once very important in their lives, had no more contact with members of skipped-generation households and became insignificant to them (macro-time).

Once again, this trend was found to be particularly true for those in skipped-generation households and less so for older people in other types of households,
who might maintain relationships with their church networks through other (often younger) adults, or who, with assistance from others around them, are still able to go to church every week. The church is an important social setting. It is, however, not the only setting. The demise of the importance of people from church is illustrative of how other social networks (relatives, old friends, neighbours and others) also disappear.

Research in North America and Western Europe has shown that children thrive when they have many powerful mesosystem-type interactions around them. Relationships that can be classified at the mesosystem level often function as bridges or links between two social settings that would otherwise remain unrelated. Bronfenbrenner (1979) provides one example, where he describes a child who goes to his first day of school unaccompanied, and whose home therefore has no link to his school other than the child itself. Were this minimal linkage between the two settings to persist, Bronfenbrenner argues, this would place the child at risk of limited cognitive and social development. Where the bridges or links are strong, on the other hand, the odds favour the development of academic competence (Garbarino 1992: 25). Another illustration supporting this is a longitudinal study conducted over a period of six months among elementary school pupils in the United States, which found a clear relationship between academic performance and linkages between family and school (Epstein 1983). Yet another longitudinal study conducted over a period of three years in Vermont, also in the United States, has shown that if the style of interaction between family members is similar to the way in which communication takes place at school, this encourages the child’s participation and performance in school (Ginsburg & Bronstein 1993).

Overall, it can be said that, in the case of children and young people, research suggests that the strength of mesosystem linkages between the system in which an intervention is implemented (whether this be schooling, parental support, income generation or psychosocial counselling) and the setting in which the child or young person spends most of his or her significant time (such as the home), is crucial to the effectiveness of the intervention and to the maintenance of its effects (Whittaker 1983, in Garbarino & Ganzell 2000: 78).

The findings of this study suggest that the mesosystem relationships around the children and young people in Misangwa in general are not as developed as they are in other settings, such as those mentioned in the cases and studies presented above. One might expect that children and young people who grow up in a society where they are regarded as social beings would have influences from many adults around them. This was indeed found to be true, since many adults in the community tend to assume parenting roles towards children, even those they are unrelated to. What was also found, however, was that the adults who assumed
parenting roles towards a particular child or young person had no contact with
one another; and even if they did engage with one another, the children and
young people were not the focus of their interactions. Rather, the children and
young people in Misangwa, particularly the younger generation in skipped-
generation households, were found to have a great deal of freedom and very few
active and functioning bridges between their different social settings.

The lack of adult influence and high levels of freedom and anonymity experi-
enced by the children and young people in skipped-generation households come
with potential risks. Because community members do not know the older guar-di-
ans, they do not know the children, and not knowing where such children or
young people belong means that fewer adults are likely to interfere or support
them.

Use of the ecological approach has brought to light the ‘social shopping’ that
some of the members of the younger generation in skipped-generation house-
holds displayed. They knew whom to approach for help and advice, and sought
contact and established relationships with adults who would be useful to their
development and well-being. As such, they were the regulators of their proximal
processes. As children regulated these proximal processes, they were able to
bring the people who could help and support them into their lives. In so doing,
they also indirectly contributed to the well-being of their households.

Through an ecological model that focuses on social relations, it was also pos-
sible to examine the cases of positive deviance among the younger generation.
The positive deviant actions of children and young people (discussed in the pre-
vious section) were often related to contact-seeking behaviour. These findings
are important for several reasons. The first is that they show that children are able
to adjust their situation according to the needs of their development arenas. The
second is that they show that children will take opportunities when they present
themselves, which means that investment in the contexts of these children will
enable them to seek what they need. This makes the targeting of interventions by
social workers or child support organisations much easier, since they may only
need to create opportunities; many children themselves will then seize the oppor-
tunities. Thirdly, it shows that children and young people should be regarded as
the key to improving the well-being of skipped-generation households.

For the deviant cases, the actual actions associated with deviancy are often
frightening and exciting at the same time. Furthermore, it takes much effort and
micro-time. Though the meso-time implied by such behaviour might be limited
(interactions of this nature generally do not occur frequently), the macro-time
implications can be far reaching. A limited number of interactions with specific
people can change these children and young people’s lives and the lives of those
they live with. These people may have little impact on children’s social contexts
and may not become part of their Microsystems or mesosystems, but in terms of well-being their impact may be significant.

As was the case with the older generation in this study, the younger generation were also found to have limited time during which proximal processes could take place and influence them. This was found in relation to all three types of time identified by Bronfenbrenner (micro-, meso- and macro-time). Theoretically, proximal processes have the biggest influence on a person’s life (macro-time) when they take place between the same people regularly and frequently (meso-time), and when they are not brief encounters (micro-time) but longer lasting interactions. When interactions take place in safe, stimulating and positive contexts, they are likely to have stronger outcomes. In many of the skipped-generation households studied, the opposite was found to be true.

In skipped-generation households, the proximal processes that occurred most regularly – namely the interactions among the younger generation, and between them and their older guardians – rather than providing comfort and safety, often led to stress and conflict. The proximal processes that really impacted the children and young people were those that occurred during their interactions with their peers, neighbours, and the other adults whom they specifically sought out. With the latter two groups, these interactions did not occur regularly or frequently; rather, the children and young people sought out these interactions, and thereby the proximal processes, when they needed help, support or advice – often against the wishes of their elderly guardians, who feared that such contacts would erode their own authority. As such, seeking these proximal processes can be understood as positive deviant behaviour. This contrasts with some of the findings of the other studies mentioned earlier in this section, which emphasise the importance of strong mesosystem linkages for child development.

**Well-being: Needs and preferences**

As explained in Chapter One, part of my motivation for conducting this study came from my earlier stay in Misangwa for my Master’s research in 2001. For years, it had intrigued me how the children and young people I had met were able to maintain emotional stability and physical survival in the face of such hardships. Furthermore, despite the fact that the socio-economic situation was observed to be usually better in households headed by the children’s aunts, uncles or other middle-aged relatives, during my fieldwork for this study, just as in 2001, children and young people nevertheless consistently voiced the same preference; namely that they would rather choose to live with their grandparents, even if this implied poverty, hard work and hunger.

The explanations provided by members of the younger generation regarding the households that they would prefer to live in all came down to being with
others, in this case with their grandparents, who loved them and cared for them. Even children who saw the poverty in households headed by grandparents said that they would rather live there than in the homes where they were living with other middle-aged guardians. None of the respondents expressed a preference for households where they were more likely to be provided with their basic needs in terms of food and shelter, but where they felt discriminated against and regarded as a burden. This finding has consequences for researchers trying to understand what drives children and young people in such contexts in their pursuit of well-being and a better life for themselves and their siblings.

Camfield, Streuli & Woodhead (2009) highlight three considerations that should guide well-being research among children. These are diversity, inequality and the need to respect agency. In this research, attention has been given to all three considerations. Diversity has been acknowledged throughout. The focus has been on individual children and specific households, and where possible, the research has been contextualised by the respondents and other local informants. Inequalities were sought and found to exist at the household level, in particular with relation to age and gender. For instance, younger children have different roles and relationships within their households compared to older children. Finally, there was a special emphasis on individual children and young people’s agency through the study of their behaviours and actions. One of the main findings to emerge from this was the importance of positive deviant behaviour.

The preference among children and young people to live in a household headed by a grandparent is not simply the result of their perception that the situation elsewhere is worse. This study has shown that the expectations that the younger generation have of living with their grandparents are often not met. Social roles are different, age differences between the younger and older generations are difficult to navigate, and many of the older people have problems of their own. This does not, however, change children’s preferences. One explanation for this is the relative equality among members of skipped-generation households. Both of my research studies (in 2001 and 2009) have shown that orphaned children living with aunts, uncles, older siblings or other middle-aged guardians must often compete with the biological children of their new guardians. This increases the risk of these children facing discrimination and other forms of inequality. In skipped-generation households, there are no biological children and thus the younger generation in these households run a much lower risk of facing discriminatory or unequal treatment.
The future of skipped-generation households

This study focused mostly on the past and present of skipped-generation households. It is important to say something about their – uncertain – future. The most important contributor to the uncertainty of such households is the advanced age of the heads of these households. Indeed, some of the grandparents in this study have probably died since the fieldwork took place. The question is what will happen to the grandchildren who remain behind.

During this study, even though there must have been households in Misangwa where the grandparent heading a skipped-generation household had died prior to the execution of the fieldwork, and the household continued in one form or another, none was found. This absence of empirical data on former (now disintegrated or reconfigured) skipped-generation households leaves us with questions and not answers about the likely future for the members of these households. In light of this lack, possible hypothetical scenarios for what might happen to the members of such households will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

One possible scenario is that following the death of the older guardian, the younger generation will remain where they are and the skipped-generation household will become a child-headed household or a household headed by a young person. During the household survey conducted in Misangwa in 2009 among 200 households, however, no child-headed households were found. I also conducted two household surveys (one in Misangwa, the other in Serenje district in Eastern Province) in 2001, which covered a total of 410 households; yet again, no child-headed households were found. This is somewhat surprising since other research has found such households in Zambia (see for example Payne 2009 & 2012) and other countries in the region, including Zimbabwe (Foster et al. 2007), Rwanda (Thurman et al. 2006) and Kenya (Ayieko 2003).

I did not specifically look for child-headed households in the household surveys, though since the sample selection was completely random, there are no reasons why such households would not have been included had they been encountered. In fact, in other regards the findings of the household survey conducted for this study do correspond to other findings, for example on the prevalence of ‘skip-generation’ households as a living arrangement for older people in Zambia and in 19 other sub-Saharan African countries (Zimmer 2009). Possible explanations for the absence of child-headed households in the surveys may be that they occur more readily in urban areas (all of my surveys were conducted in rural areas), and that if and when they do occur in rural areas someone in the community may be assigned as the guardian of the household (USAID/SCOPE/FHI 2002). I did find several households consisting only of children and young people, but these were all young nuclear families consisting of one or two young
parents, their children, and possibly one or two siblings of the young adults in the home. The fact that I did not find any child-headed households in 2001 or 2009 does not mean that they are not there, but it does show that there are not many in the areas where I carried out my studies.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study are relevant for child-headed households. The ways in which the members of the younger generation in skipped-generation households were observed to work together and care for each other, and how the older children and young people provided for their younger siblings, are crucial elements for the ‘success’ of child-headed households. It could even be suggested that the findings of this study indicate that it might be easier for the younger generation to live in a child-headed household than a skipped-generation household, since in many skipped-generation households the older person was more of a burden than a blessing for the children and young people, in terms of the pursuit of their development and well-being. This does not mean, however, that nothing is lost when the older guardian in a skipped-generation household dies. In fact, this study has shown that despite many problems, the younger generation cared greatly about their grandparents and wanted to care for them, even in times of adversity in their relationships.

If up to now few skipped-generation households in Misingwa have become child-headed households following the death of the older generation, then other scenarios might shed light on what has happened (or what in the future will happen) to them. A possibility is that the household will disintegrate and that the remaining household members will be distributed between other households. On the one hand this seems unlikely because the very nature of skipped-generation households is built on the lack of choices and alternatives. If there were other relatives available to care for the children and young people, then the young and the old would probably not have been living together in the first place. Given the observed absence of child-headed-households, however, it might nevertheless be a feasible possibility. In such instances, one could hypothesise that once the household disintegrates following the death of the grandparent, there might be no alternative for the children and young people but to join another household, especially if the children are relatively young and unable to care for themselves.

The data collected for this study does not reveal whether or not this scenario actually takes place, but it does suggest that the members of former skipped-generation households do not necessarily remain where they are. What the data does show is that there were no skipped-generation households in the sample of 65 households where another older person had recently taken over after the death of the initial older head of the household. The role of the older generation in the community is profound and one might expect that when one older person dies
another older person will step into the void to care for the children and young people left behind. As stated, however, no evidence was found for this.

Overall, it seems likely that all of the scenarios mentioned above are plausible. Following the death of the older generation, some households might become child-headed households, and some might transition from skipped-generation households into ‘normal’ households if the oldest members of the younger generation are over 18 years and are officially recognised as adults. Other households may disintegrate and the surviving household members will ‘disappear’, scattering across different households in different places. In other cases, another relative, maybe but not necessarily an older person, will step in to assume guardianship. In yet another scenario, other non-related adults, possibly assigned by the chief in the area, could be appointed as the new responsible guardian.

Whether or not the outcome is beneficial for the younger generation depends on many factors. One thing that is clear is that the younger generation often sees the older generation as a limiting factor for their development. Perhaps those left behind will do better in socio-economic terms and maybe even in terms of well-being. What is also clear is that with the death of the older generation, the children and young people again face uncertainty and change. They may need to relocate and they will have to find their own way in new contexts and with new people around them. They have no assurances that they will find a stable environment where they can work to improve their own situation and that of their siblings. Despite all of the problems that they may have encountered and all of the conflicts that they may have had with their older guardians, many will probably find that when they look back, they will not evaluate it negatively and they will probably suggest that their grandparents really did all that they could. Indeed, many grandparents did succeed (even if only partially) in raising the children and young people in their care and helping them to develop from young children into healthy, educated and socially well-adjusted young adults.

Recommendations

In this final section, some recommendations that follow directly from the research findings are presented. These are ordered according to three categories: livelihood, social well-being, and social protection. While these recommendations are specific to skipped-generation households in Misangwa, it seems probable that most hold truth for skipped-generation households in rural settings elsewhere in southern Africa.
Livelihood recommendations

The following recommendations relate to the agricultural activities of the skipped-generation households that were studied.

• Make available agricultural implements that make work easier for the elderly

In most skipped-generation households, both the older and the younger generations are involved in farming. Elderly people, however, find the physical activity exhausting and suffer from backache and joint pains. In OECD countries, there is now an array of tools available – such as those that would allow the older generation to plant seeds, to weed or to plough – that would reduce the hardships they face in engaging in manual labour. In aid packages and development assistance, it would be valuable to consider provision of such tools.

• Promote urban agriculture\(^1\) practices

Urban agriculture has been promoted across sub-Saharan Africa as a cheap and easy solution for growing vegetables when space and water are limited. In skipped-generation households, these agricultural techniques could be useful for older people with limited physical capacities. Though the lack of space, which is the primary driver of the rebirth of urban agriculture, is not a problem for rural households, a common problem found was that due to physical limitations, the older people could not walk to their fields, water their plants every day, or protect their crops from animals or theft. If urban agriculture techniques and methods were to be promoted in such areas and among such households, these issues could be largely resolved.

• Provide storage facilities

A significant problem that emerged during the fieldwork is the fact that many people in Misangwa are unable to store their harvests. They are therefore unable to benefit from the seasonal variations in the price of maize, and are likely to experience food shortages and hunger even if they are able to grow enough for their household for the whole year. When their maize is ready, the price is at its lowest, and when they run out of food, the price is at its highest. Traditional means of storage are no longer applicable because of theft, and people’s homes are too small to store food in. If they had the means to store maize – such as a

\(^1\) Urban agriculture refers to the growing of food – fruits, vegetables, eggs, meat, honey, and even maize – in urban areas. These areas include yards, vacant lots, community gardens, highway medians, and other open spaces. In Lusaka, Zambia, the practice has been found to play a critical role in improving food security for vulnerable urban dwellers, particularly the elderly, women and children with limited available space and low levels of human resources (see for example Hampwayne et al. 2007 and Hampwayne 2008).
lockable cargo container or prefab shed – households would be able to negotiate the market better and therefore have more opportunities to benefit from higher maize prices at certain times of the year. They could also avoid the necessity of dealing with urban traders who offer poor deals and exploit households’ desperation during the ‘hunger months’, and would be able to store more food to see them through the year.

- Increase the inclusion criteria of livelihood interventions

There are some government programmes providing agricultural support in Misangwa, as there are in other areas of rural Zambia. One common problem for skipped-generation households in areas where there are interventions is that members of these households cannot access these programmes or services as they are offered at specific locations, such as agricultural depots, which they cannot travel to. Furthermore, agricultural support, livelihood support, micro-credit schemes and community savings initiatives are not available to members of skipped-generation households, because the two generations are either too young or too old to be eligible. Both generations are regarded as unproductive, and the assumption is made that the elderly will not be able to pay back any debts that they incur. This attitude needs to change so that these groups, who are responsible for the livelihoods of their households, can access such services.

- Provide agricultural training to skipped-generation households

This research found a lot of stress and conflict in skipped-generation households. In some cases, this was the result of disagreements about how the household should farm and which agricultural strategies should be followed, primarily due to the variations in the level of knowledge of agricultural methods between the older and younger generations. Providing agricultural training to the young or the old separately is likely to cause further disagreements and increase the gap between the two generations. By providing training to both groups together, they are more likely to pursue the same goals using the same strategies. This will improve their agricultural output and contribute to reducing stress and conflict in the home. Furthermore, while the information provided through such training might not be of much benefit to some members of the younger generation (since they might already have learned a lot about modern methods from their parents), it would nevertheless help them in the sense that their guardians would learn about these techniques. It would no longer be a struggle for the younger generation to convince their guardians to use more modern farming methods; rather, the new information would help the older guardians to make the decisions that the younger generation yearns for.
Recommendations related to social well-being

The following recommendations relate to the social well-being of the members of skipped-generation households.

- Stimulate the formation of Old People’s Associations (OPAs)
  Loneliness, destitution and victimisation are common feelings among members of the older generation living in skipped-generation households. Many of these older people have no idea that there are other skipped-generation households close to their own households. During FGDs, members of the older generation were brought together. Many knew each other but had not seen one another in years. They had previously thought that they were the only older person in the area heading such a household, only to find that everyone present in the FGD was in the same position. Sharing experiences, advice and finding common ground was experienced positively by all. Some discussion groups agreed to meet regularly. To enable older heads of skipped-generation households to come into contact with others, it is recommended to organise or provide incentives that stimulate the formation of OPAs. Church groups and NGOs in rural areas could be useful in organising and facilitating such gatherings.

- Provide life skills training for children and young people
  This research has explored the benefits of positive deviant actions among children and young people. Those engaging in positive deviant behaviours were found to have better developmental outcomes and to experience higher levels of well-being. Positive deviance is something that can be linked to personality and to the survival of earlier traumatic experiences. It is also something that can be promoted and stimulated. Training programmes aimed at providing life skills and promoting confidence and self-worth among children and young people are likely to have many benefits. The examples of positive deviance observed in the research benefited both the individual and their whole household. Thus, by providing life skills training for members of the younger generation, the whole skipped-generation household is likely to benefit.

- Increase general knowledge about skipped-generation households
  In Misangwa specifically, and in Zambia in general, there is little knowledge about the existence, prevalence and suffering of skipped-generation households. Most of the people who became aware of these households through their involvement in this research were shocked. Many were willing to invest time, food or money to assist members of such households once they got to know them. This research has shown that such friendships can be valuable to the well-being
of those residing in such households, as well as to the mesosystems of the children and young people living there. Giving more attention to skipped-generation households locally (in church) and regionally or nationally (through media coverage) could enable communities to support the skipped-generation households in their area, that would otherwise have remained unknown to them.

Social protection recommendations

The following recommendations relate to social protection interventions.

• Promote unconditional cash transfers

During the fieldwork, it was noted that the priorities of skipped-generation households coincide with the priorities of the international development community. Respondents said that they needed support for three things: food, the quality and condition of their homes, and education. These issues, and people’s health which is also related to their housing conditions, are also things that many development policies also aim to achieve. When viewing health as intrinsically linked to social determinants such as housing and nutrition, we see how much these agendas overlap. Having established this, it is likely that any financial support given to these households will be spent on these issues, given the priorities defined by the respondents. One important recommendation in this regard is that the cash transfers should be provided to the older children and young people in these households. This is because this study has shown that many older people spend valuable household money on beer. The advantage of making cash transfers unconditional (i.e. cash that the recipients can spend as they see fit and that has not been earmarked in any way) is that it provides recipients with a sense of ownership, pride and satisfaction. It also allows them a certain flexibility to negotiate changing contexts or needs.

• Recognise the limitations of cash transfers

Since no social protection interventions were being carried out in Misangwa, I visited several projects in other areas (for example, Zambia’s Ministry of Community Development and Social Services pilot programme of cash transfers for poor households in the district of Kalomo, Rainbow’s agricultural support programme in Sakania, and the cash transfer programme run by UNICEF and partners in Livingstone). What became clear is that these programmes would not benefit the people of Misangwa at the time when they need this support most. The need for support is highest in the months between November and April, the rainy season, and is a period termed the ‘hunger months’ because during this time people have the least money and food. It is also during this time that the
worst drops in well-being take place: houses collapse due to heavy rains, people go hungry, and children drop out of school because of the necessity to pay fees and PTA contributions in January. During this time, Misangwa is, as are many other rural communities in Zambia, unreachable by road. Thus it becomes impossible to bring money or goods to the community. Even if people do have money at this time, there is little or no food for sale. Cash transfers or other forms of social protection support cannot be delivered during this period. For the people of Misangwa, especially members of skipped-generation households, any social protection support would therefore only be a temporary and limited solution. They would benefit much more from proper food storage facilities, better infrastructure, varied agricultural practices, and other ways to prepare a buffer for the hunger season.

- **Support households, not individuals**

Households should be the focus of policy, not specific groups of individuals. Several examples illustrate this. A grant for older people might benefit the older person in a skipped-generation household, but if that person lives with ten orphaned grandchildren then the grant is likely to have little impact. School feeding programs will benefit the children who are at school, but will do little for those children who have finished or dropped out of school and are at home or working on the fields. Furthermore, child support grants, as seen in South Africa, Namibia and Malawi, would likely have adverse effects on the caring arrangement currently seen in Misangwa. Evidence shows that there is a scramble for orphans amongst family members in places where child support grants are provided (see for example Hearle & Ruwanpura 2009). The distribution of children among relatives, who all want to receive the grants, does not always benefit the individual children, who might be better off together with siblings. Additionally, the financial incentive that is created by such grants means that people want to take in the children, but it does not make them want to care for them. One exception, which has been discussed, is that pensions (related to a person age and not to their role as guardians) do have a positive influence on the older person and on those living with them. Generally however, experience shows that interventions should target vulnerable households and not vulnerable individuals. This research has shown that skipped-generation households are a good starting point for targeting the most vulnerable.
• Continue to advocate for the Zambian government to uphold its commitments to social protection

Through the Netherlands Embassy and the Zambian Offices of the German Society for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), both located in Lusaka, I was able to access various budgeting and spending reports from the Zambian government. While analysing these reports, it became clear that the government was only honouring its commitment to the Livingstone Declaration on Social Protection (AU 2006) on paper. Overview budgets showed that 4% of government spending was being directed towards social protection. More detailed reports on actual spending showed that less than 1% of that money was being used to support the most vulnerable in society. Shady accounting and hard to trace expenses hide the true spending by the government. The donor community or civil society organisations should analyse the government’s spending accounts and hold them accountable. The people who should be benefitting from social protection cannot do this. Therefore, others need to continuously pressure the government so that they uphold their promises on social protection.

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2 GTZ is now known as GIZ: The German Society for International Cooperation.