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## From the Formulation of a National Policy to the Compilation of Social Protection Actions: A Case of 'Non-design' in Burkina Faso

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This article is a translation of:

[De la formulation d'une politique nationale à la compilation d'actions de protection sociale : un cas de « non-design » au Burkina Faso](#)

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### ABSTRACT

To improve the social protection of its population, Burkina Faso adopted a national policy in 2012. This paper analyses the process whereby this policy was formulated, looking at the issue from the standpoint of 'policy design' (Howlett and Mukherjee, 2014). Conducted in accordance with an inductive qualitative approach, the collection and analysis of the data show that this process of formulation has led neither to reflecting on the problem to be solved nor to identifying the specific needs of the beneficiaries. Nor has it led to evaluating the potential outcomes of the proposed solutions in order to choose the most appropriate ones. The authors are thus led to an empirical observation of 'non-design'. This policy boils down to a document whose all-encompassing content brings together every conceivable action of social protection, without any arbitration. Three factors have contributed to this non-formulation: (1) the lack of clear government direction to guide discussions; (2) a weakness of support and of political will, resulting in a low degree of involvement in the process on the part of high-level decision makers; and (3) conceptual and technical misunderstandings on the part of national stakeholders in social protection—so much so that they have simply relied on the advice of international bodies. The government announced its intention of playing a leading role in the process of formulating this policy, but this was a purely rhetorical declaration. The study shows that leadership and political will have been lacking, particularly when it has come to channelling the respective interests of the stakeholders and managing the contradictions that hinder the formulation of a coherent policy adapted to the needs of the population.

### OUTLINE

#### 1. Introduction

#### 2. What Do We Know about the Formulation of Social Protection Policies?

#### 3. The Methodological Approach

##### 3.1 Respondent Identification and Data Collection Instruments

##### 3.2 Data Analysis

#### 4. The Results

##### 4.1 The Institutional Mechanism for Steering the Formulation Process

##### 4.2 From the Intention of Formulating an NSPP to a Compilation of Social Protection Actions

##### 4.3 Factors Contributing to a 'Non-design' Type of Formulation

###### 4.3.1 Lack of clarity and government guidance

###### 4.3.2 An Ambiguous Political Will and a Cautious Senior Administration

###### 4.3.3 A Limited Understanding of Social Protection

##### 4.4. Stakeholders' Logics in the 'Non-design' Type of Formulation Process

[4.4.1 The Logic of National Stakeholders](#)

[4.4.2 The Logic of the Group of Technical and Financial Partners](#)

## **5. Discussion: Policy Formulation and Appropriation by Stakeholders**

[5.1 Government Leadership and Stakeholder Competence](#)

[5.2 Government Leadership and the Intention of Formulating or Appropriating Policies](#)

[5.3 The Usefulness of the Concept of 'Non-design'](#)

## **6. Conclusion**

[List of initialisms](#)

[Top of page](#)

**FULL TEXT**

PDF [Send by e-mail](#)

# **1. Introduction**

1In response to the 2008 economic crisis, the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) launched the Social Protection Floor (SPF) Initiative. This approach aims to protect and empower people throughout their lives through a set of integrated measures designed to ensure basic income security for all and access to affordable and essential social services (ILO, 2011). In building a national social protection system, this floor is a first step towards higher levels of protection. Each country can establish minimum services based on its capacity, needs and population characteristics (ILO, 2011). This initiative has encouraged low- and middle-income countries to formulate policies to establish or strengthen their social protection system (Merrien, 2013). Some African countries have developed national social safety net programmes—based, for example, on cash and non-cash transfers (family allowances, social pensions, food transfers) or exemptions from payment for health and education services (Cherrier 2016; Roelen et al., 2017). Others have formulated a National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) to address the fragmentation and poor coordination of isolated programmes and projects, often designed and funded by donors (Devereux and Macauslan, 2006). An NSPP sets out national guidelines and includes non-contributory instruments (social safety nets) and contributory instruments (national insurance). It formulates objectives, principles, strategies and programmes (Pino and Confalonieri, 2014).

2In 2009, the establishment of an SPF in Burkina Faso launched a process of reflection on the development of an NSPP, which was finally adopted in 2012. The persistent deficit of social protection and its consequences for the everyday lives of the population contributed to arousing the interest of the government (Kadio et al., 2018).

3This NSPP aimed to 'contribute to a qualitative change in the living conditions of all social strata by (i) the development of an adequate and sustainable mechanism for the prevention and coverage of major risks and the management of shocks, and (ii) the extension of national insurance to all categories of workers and the widening of the range of benefits to all social risks' (Government of Burkina Faso, 2012, 42). Few studies have attempted to analyse the process of formulating such policies. Yet problems in formulating a policy subsequently limit its implementation and its ability to achieve its objectives (Howlett, 2014). It is at this stage that the transformation of a problem into potential action occurs (Berlan et al., 2014). Thus, this article sets out to analyse the process of formulating the NSPP in Burkina Faso, with the aim of providing elements that will contribute to its revision and of enlightening other countries engaged in similar processes. The following sections will be devoted to a review of the literature on the formulation of social protection policies; we will then set out the methodological approach adopted and present and discuss the results, before concluding.

## **2. What Do We Know about the Formulation of Social Protection Policies?**

4Perceived as the stage between policy agenda setting and the implementation of that policy, formulation remains in many ways a 'missing link', a neglected phase in the study of public policies (Berlan et al., 2014; Howlett, 2009), particularly in Africa (Lavigne Delville, 2017). By the process of formulation, or 'policy design', we mean the deliberative and decision-making process during which the content of a policy is put together through the definition of objectives, the choice of a causal model, of

instruments, and of target groups, and the identification of a programme of action allotting responsibilities for implementation (Bobrow, 2006; Hassenteufel, 2008; Howlett, 2011; Howlett and Mukherjee, 2014; Peters, 2015).

<sup>5</sup>This process may be influenced by political considerations (government ideology) and/or problem-centred techniques (choices are made based on the knowledge of the context and the ability of the instruments to solve a particular problem). Depending on these influences, the process can be described as 'good design' (solutions are selected based on knowledge and experience) or 'bad' or 'poor design' (the relationships between problems and solutions are incorrectly or only partially articulated) (Chindarkar et al., 2017; Howlett and Mukherjee, 2014). In addition, it is possible to encounter situations of 'non-design' or non-formulation. In the latter case, decisions are motivated by the logics of negotiation, clientelism or electoral opportunism rather than by rigorous deliberation or evaluation (Howlett and Mukherjee, 2014; Howlett and Mukherjee, 2017). Empirical studies on the formulation of NSPPs in sub-Saharan Africa are few and far between. Research has focused on social safety net programmes, especially their implementation and effectiveness. These studies have sometimes raised questions about wording but have not elaborated further on the topic (Devereux and White, 2012; Garcia et al., 2012; Holmes and Lwanga-Ntale, 2012; Monchuk, 2014). Some research on the formulation of social safety net programmes has shown that international organisations and financial institutions strongly influence the choice of content, without, however, explaining how this influence is exercised (Awortwi and Aiyede, 2017; Cherrier, 2016; Gliszczynski, 2013; Lavers and Hickey, 2015). Overall, national stakeholders involved in policy formulation incorporate ideas passed on by these transnational bodies and often find it difficult to reach consensus on the details of their implementation (Awortwi and Aiyede, 2017; Foli, 2016; Niño-Zarazúa et al., 2012). In addition, the expectations of governments in the area of social cohesion (Hickey, 2011; Mkandawire, 2004) influence the formulation of social safety net programmes (choice of content, allocation of resources and beneficiaries) (Awortwi and Aiyede, 2017; Barrientos and Pellissery 2012; Pellissery and Barrientos, 2013). In addition, empirical research on formulation processes in low-income countries suffers from a certain analytical weakness due to the use of highly descriptive approaches (Hutchinson et al., 2011; Gilson et al., 2008). Researchers rarely use theories of policy analysis to guide their thinking and barely address the decisive factors behind their choice of solution (Berlan et al., 2014; Gilson and Raphaely, 2008). Although the majority of these policies have been promoted by international bodies, national governments sometimes decide on content against the advice of donors (Olivier de Sardan and Ridde, 2014; Wireko and Bédand, 2017).

### **3. The Methodological Approach**

<sup>6</sup>This research is a unique case study (Yin, 2008) applied to the NSPP.

#### **3.1 Respondent Identification and Data Collection Instruments**

<sup>7</sup>Data collection was guided by the 'policy design' perspective, which states that all instruments or solutions are linked to the objectives of the decision makers, the resources available to the stakeholders of the implementation process, and the characteristics of the target groups and beneficiaries of the relevant public policy (Howlett and Mukherjee, 2014). Here, data collection was undertaken with the aim of understanding the links between the constituent elements of the NSPP from the point of view of the stakeholders. We sought to understand their logic of change and to identify the characteristics and attributes of the instruments that determined their choices. We used three methods of data collection: informal interviews, document analysis and semi-structured interviews. The Permanent Secretariat of the NSPP served as an entry point for data collection. Informal exploratory interviews allowed us access to the reports of working groups and minutes of meetings. In this way, we were able to reconstruct the chronological steps of the formulation and establish a preliminary list of key informants for in-depth interviews. These interviews identified other persons/resources through the 'snowball' recruitment technique (Pires, 1997). In this phase, we addressed four themes: (1) the role, composition and functioning of the NSPP's formulation mechanism; (2) the choice of solutions and instruments; (3) the

knowledge of the characteristics of the solutions and the justification for the choices made; and (4) the arguments used to defend views regarding the preferred solutions. A preliminary analysis conducted after five interviews showed that the stakeholders worked in accordance with a logic that resulted in a situation of 'non-design' (Howlett and Mukherjee, 2014). Two new themes were therefore added to the interview guide: (5) factors favouring the 'non-design' type of formulation process; and (6) the logics guiding the choice of content in this type of formulation.

8A total of 41 interviews—10 exploratory and 31 in-depth—with 36 respondents were completed and recorded. The sample consisted of senior government officials (n = 20), heads and managers of non-governmental organisations and local associations (n = 7), as well as officials and senior staff of UN agencies and bilateral cooperation bodies (n = 9). We analysed 51 documents: preparatory workshop reports and documents (n = 10), national guidance documents (n = 4), reports of the Monitoring Committee sessions (n = 6), specialised committee reports (n = 2), decrees to establish NSPP development committees (n = 2), comments and recommendations from technical and financial partners with regard to the NSPP (n = 2), study reports on social safety nets (n = 2), NSPP project versions (n = 3) and stakeholders' forum reports with regard to the NSPP (n = 2).

## **3.2 Data Analysis**

9Inductive thematic analysis without a pre-established analysis grid guided data processing (Blais and Martineau, 2006; Paillé and Mucchielli, 2012). The interviews were fully transcribed and coded using the software NVivo 11. A first open and complete coding allowed the data to be broken down into segments of discourse and renamed. Each segment represented a unit of meaning associated with an idea, a fact or an event, to which we assigned labels to identify a theme. Depending on the meaning or idea that emerged, each portion of discourse was coded in NVivo nodes and sub-nodes that gradually emerged from the coding process. Thus, each unit of sense was associated with a theme or sub-theme. Then, themes that were related to one another or that shared common features were merged together. Finally, links were established between the themes (idea, fact or phenomenon), notably by looking through documents and memos (syntheses of the content of the nodes), indications of the consequences associated with the phenomena (facts, events), and indices underlining how the main themes were related to each other. Relating the data in this way resulted in a thematic network that helped explain the 'non-design' and the rationality of the stakeholders during the formulation process.

10The data was collected between November 2015 and July 2016 by the author KK, with the approval of the National Ethics Committee for Health Research in Burkina Faso, and of the University of Montreal (CERAS-2015-16-178-D). The following section presents the results of this work.

## **4. The Results**

11The results comprise four sections: the description of the formulation process, the assessment of the process and of the content of the policy, the factors favouring a formulation of the 'non-design' type, and the logics of the stakeholders.

### **4.1 The Institutional Mechanism for Steering the Formulation Process**

12On the instructions of the Prime Minister, the Minister of the Economy and Finance (MEF) set up, in February 2010, an inter-ministerial institutional mechanism bringing together members of the administration as well as representatives of technical and financial partners (TFPs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local associations (Figure 1). The composition and role of each of the bodies involved are described below.

**Figure 1. Institutional mechanism for formulating the NSPP.**



[Zoom Original \(png, 63k\)](#)

Source: The authors.

**13The Inter-ministerial Steering Committee (ISC)**, chaired by the Secretary General (SG) of the MEF, was the decision and guidance body. It comprised fifteen members, including the SGs of ten sectoral ministries and one representative from each of the following structures: the Prime Minister's Office, the group of TFPs on Social Protection, the association of municipalities the association of regions; and civil society represented by the Burkina Faso Movement for Human and Peoples' Rights (MBDHP). The six ISC sessions, which were held between July 2010 and March 2012, served as a forum for discussions and amendments to the work of the Executive Secretariat, and for planning new tasks. Each SG ensured that the future policy was consistent with the actions or interventions of their ministry with regards to social protection.

**14The Special Commission in Charge of National Insurance**, chaired by the SG of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, consisted of directorates and technical secretariats attached to seven ministries as well as representatives of the Prime Minister's Office, the group of TFPs, the civil society, the association of municipalities; and the association of regions. The Commission's mandate was to draw up a report on the state of social safety nets and to propose a strategy for extending these benefits to the entire population.

**15The Specialised Commission for Social Safety Nets**, chaired by the SG of the Ministry of Social Action and National Solidarity, was composed of directorates and technical secretariats attached to eleven ministries as well as representatives of the Prime Minister's Office, the group of TFPs, the civil society; the association of municipalities; and the association of regions. This commission was tasked with drawing up an inventory of social safety nets and proposing a strategy for extending these services, with the aim of contributing to a qualitative change in the living conditions of poor or vulnerable social groups. Its report was developed through the process of the compiling of a single template that was completed by each member of the Commission.

**16The Executive Secretariat** was hosted by the Poverty Reduction Policy Coordination Directorate (DCPRP) of the MEF. It was in charge of drafting the reports of the ISC and carrying out the tasks entrusted to it. In addition to officials from the DCPRP, the Secretariat included senior staff from the Directorates of Studies and Planning of five sectoral ministries. It facilitated and coordinated the mechanism and drafted the NSPP proposal based on the reports of the two specialised commissions.

**17**Following the production of the NSPP proposal, the Permanent Secretariat for NGO Coordination (the SPONG) organised a validation forum in June 2012. This forum was organised following a complaint brought by the SPONG, which felt that it had been excluded from the process despite the fact that it saw itself as the legitimate representative of civil society on social protection issues. In 2012, the SPONG brought together 114-member organisations, including NGOs and national and international

development associations, foundations, research centres, etc. It presented itself as a framework for consultation that allowed its members to act more coherently in the field and to dialogue jointly with the State and the TFPs. However, the official representative of civil society in the ISC was the MBDHP—as a member of the National Council of Civil Society—and NGO members of the SPONG took part in the process as individuals. For example, support structures for health insurance bodies took part in the Commission in charge of national insurance. The SPONG's complaint was probably the result of a lack of consultation within national civil society; moreover, the SPONG acknowledged that its approach, aimed at taking part in the process as a guarantor of civil society, came after the support given by the African Social Protection Platform (APSP, 2012). The latter is a regional network of NGOs and social protection stakeholders, working for the participation and the 'voice' of civil society in the formulation of national policies and programmes of social protection (APSP and CONGAD, 2013). Unable to make major changes to the content (Figure 2), the forum organised by the SPONG identified nine points to be considered in the implementation of the policy, including clarifying the government's perception of social protection, defining institutional language more clearly, reaching consensus on the definition of social protection, and ensuring greater involvement of ministerial departments in implementation. These recommendations attest to the presence of grey areas in politics.

18 On 28 and 29 June 2012, the MEF organised a national validation forum that brought together 100 people from government, parliament, civil society, local authorities, the private sector, traditional chiefdoms, religious communities and TFPs. Participants worked in subgroups to amend the draft policy. This forum 'promoted the appropriation of the policy by the different categories of stakeholders and made it possible to reach a consensus on the document' (MEF, 2013, 3). However, the various interviews showed that the discussions were 'tense' because of differences of opinion and that this forum organised by the MEF almost 'fizzled out'. No major changes were made in this context and the document was finally adopted.

19 The policy was formulated between February 2010 and September 2012, following a process organised into three periods (see Figure 2). During the first eight months, the institutional mechanism was put in place; the templates and mandates were drawn up. The second 17-month period was devoted to the work of developing the NSPP, including the drafting of the reports of the two commissions, the drawing up of the draft policies and the validation sessions of the CPI. During the last three months of the process, two national validation workshops were held and the policy was adopted by the Council of Ministers.

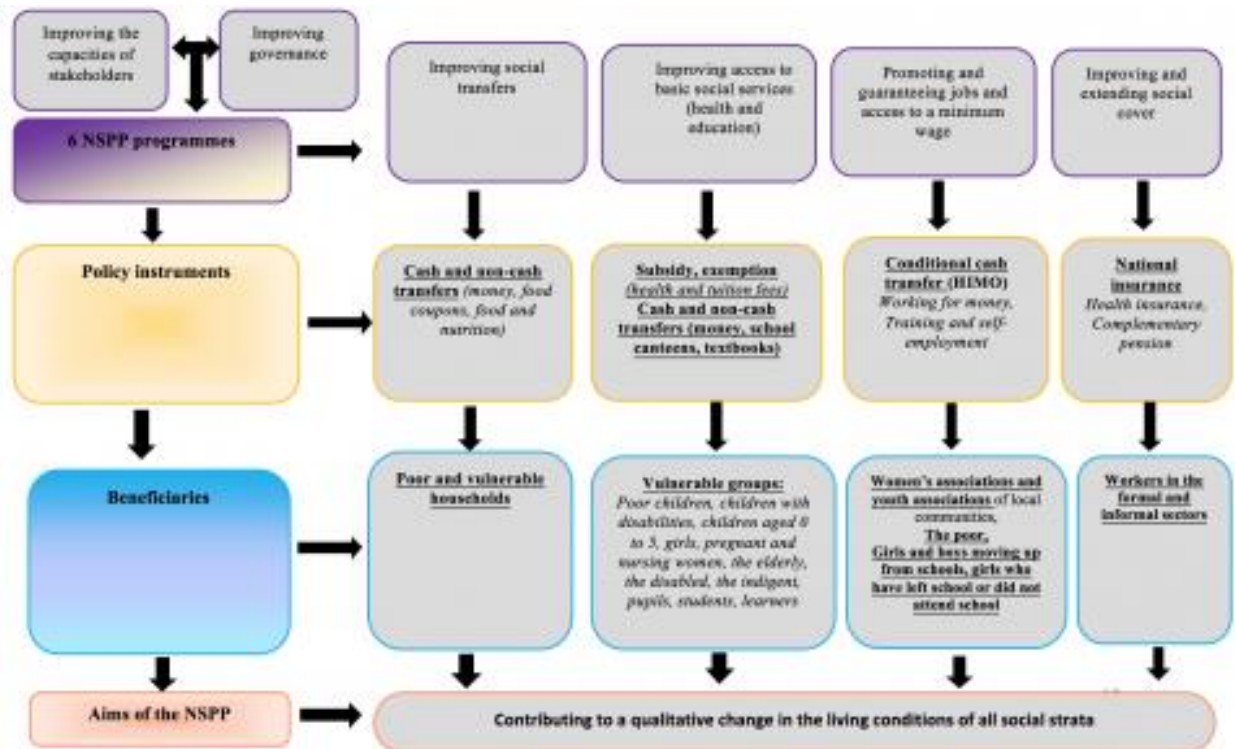
**Figure 2. Chronology of the development steps of the NSPP**

Stages	Period 1					Period 2					Period 3		
	02/10	04/10	05/30	07/30	10/30	02/11	06/11	08/11	10/11	01/12	03/12	06/12	08/12
Setting up of the Inter-ministerial Steering Committee (ISC)	■												
Technical workshop on social protection: Drafting a national vision		■											
Development of a roadmap for the attention of the inter-ministerial committee			■										
Setting up of the Inter-ministerial Steering Committee (ISC)				■									
2nd session of the ISC - NSPP framing note - Terms of reference of the two specialised commissions (social safety nets and social security) - Rules of procedure of the ISC					■								
Final report of the Commission for Social Security						■							
Final report of the Commission for Social Security Safety Nets							■						
3rd session of the ISC - Examination of the reports of the specialised commissions - Examination of the draft plan for the NSPP - Examination of the draft action plan for the NSPP - Examination of the timing of the development of the NSPP								■					
Working session of the Executive Secretariat (drawing up the NSPP proposal)									■				
4th session of the ISC: Examination of the NSPP proposal										■			
5th session of the ISC: - Examination and validation of the NSPP proposal - Examination of the NSPP action plan											■		
6th session of the ISC: Validation of the NSPP action plan												■	
Forum for civil society (organised by the SPONG): Amendment of the NSPP project and the action plan													■
National forum (organised by the MEF): Validation of the NSPP and action plan													■
Adoption of the NSPP by the Council of Ministers													■

Zoom Original (png, 748k)

Source: The authors.

Figure 3. NSPP 2012



Zoom Original (png, 522k)

Source: The authors.

## **4.2 From the Intention of Formulating an NSPP to a Compilation of Social Protection Actions**

20The formulation process made it impossible to reflect on the problem to be solved, to identify the specific needs of the beneficiaries, or to evaluate the effectiveness of the solutions in order to choose the most appropriate ones.

21Stakeholders failed to clearly identify the issues, or to analyse the interrelationships between the envisaged policy instruments, the beneficiaries and the objectives of the policy. According to one member of the Secretariat, *"The diagnostic phase was missed. We brought together the stakeholders, and everyone told us what he was doing. In practical terms we tried to put it all together."*

22Almost all possible actions were taken into account, but their capacity to produce the anticipated results was not assessed beforehand. A member of the Executive Secretariat and the commission in charge of social safety nets said: *"So here it is; read it; you will see that there are all the possible answers when it comes to social protection."* Most stakeholders saw the process as an inventory of actions already taken or opportunities for implementation, not as a selection process. The NSPP is therefore a summary of all possible actions as regards social protection: it is *"a hotchpotch pot-pourri," "a catch-all strategy" "a jumble," "an inventory," "a blend," "takes everything into account" is "a cartography of what's been done," and "a summary of the actions of stakeholders who intervene every which way."* The representative of one NGO made the following observation: *"Speaking sincerely, it's a list of all the things that have been done. Because each stakeholder has included what he or she does."* For a member of the group of TFPs, *"The NSPP is a hollow document that has the merit of existing. It's a jumble of all the steering projects."*

23Some public administration officials do not recognise the document as a policy and have expressed their frustration: *"It's not a policy. I admit, when we did the last validation, I told the guys at the ILO that I was not satisfied. They told me that a policy can always be revised. Be satisfied with that. Already, having a document is better than nothing."*

24The lack of consistency between the different components of a comprehensive social protection system ('social safety nets' and 'national insurance') remains an important limitation of the NSPP. A member of the commission in charge of national insurance said, *"It's very compartmentalised. We're juxtaposing two visions of the world without any integration—assistance and assurance, that's all, but it's not written in a coherent way."* According to one member of the group of partners, *"The reflection has not led to any strategy for improving consistency between actions."* For example, the integration of clear relationships between the health insurance system under construction and the social safety nets in the health sector were not perceived.

25In sum, the NSPP resulting from this formulation process is perceived neither as a real policy nor as the result of a process of choice of content based on the evaluation and analysis of the characteristics of the solutions. On the basis of the opinions of the stakeholders concerned, we can therefore consider that this is a case of 'non-design' or 'non-formulation'. In this context, we have sought to understand why this process has led to the development of a document that brings together all possible social protection actions without proceeding to arbitration.

## **4.3 Factors Contributing to a 'Non-design' Type of Formulation**

26Three interrelated factors favouring non-formulation emerged from the data review.



### **4.3.1 Lack of clarity and government guidance**

27 Officials lacked the necessary governmental orientation to guide their discussions. According to one of the partners, “The government had no clear vision in relation to the development of this strategy. So, stakeholders wrote according to their vision, their understanding.” The Executive Secretariat was inspired by a note of guidance drafted by the MEF with the support of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) to develop the mandates of the specialised commissions and the drafting plan of the NSPP. These mandates did not provide a government vision. Government views and expectations with regard to social protection were not collected. According to one ISC member, ‘There has not been any interview phase with members of the government in order to hear about their expectations on the issue’. Thus, the minimum content of the Social Protection Floor (SPF) was not clarified, but left to the discretion of the CPI, and each commission produced a document consistent with its own vision.

### **4.3.2 An Ambiguous Political Will and a Cautious Senior Administration**

28 During the process, weak political support resulted in insufficient involvement and over-cautiousness on the part of high-level decision makers. One partner expressed the following opinion: “*I didn’t feel the political will that accompanied that document. It’s not enough to give your OK for a process and then turn your back and let others do whatever they want.*” The members of the Executive Secretariat noted several facts illustrating the low involvement level of high-level administrators: a reluctance to participate in the discussions as well as the repeated and unjustified absences of some ministry SGs from ministries at meetings, despite repeated reminders to attend from the Chair of the Committee. The mobilisation of stakeholders was the main difficulty. The remarks of one participant speak volumes: “*You invite people to a meeting; they don’t come. The real problem is that you’ll never see more than three secretaries general at a CPI meeting.*” The sessions of the CPI should have been favourable to decision-making and guidance—the ideal place to specify the elements not clarified in the guidance note. According to one member of the Executive Secretariat, “*It’s always fewer than 50% who attend and most are representatives of the SG, who need to refer to their hierarchy. But there are some very important decisions to be taken at the Council.*” This lack of support from high-level decision makers fostered a self-censoring attitude on the part of the Executive Secretariat, which involves treating participants in the discussions with kid gloves so as to satisfy all stakeholders.

29 In addition, the government initiated the process of developing the NSPP to meet the promise made to TFPs that it would implement a policy focused on the poor and vulnerable. But the government itself was more in favour of solutions geared towards reducing youth unemployment. According to one UNICEF executive, “*The government at the time was looking for ways and means to address this issue of youth employment. And they wanted the strategy to be much more focused on that.*” It is therefore legitimate to assume that the government’s decision to develop an NSPP was a purely symbolic act—hence the low level of state participation. For example, the NSPP has been described as an instrument of government propaganda to make people believe in national solidarity. An MEF executive expressed this view in these terms: “*Since the government was criticised on both sides for not doing a damn thing, and not providing its people with support, it needed to do this to show it was concerned.*” For a representative of the TFPs, “*it’s also a way of saying to the people: Look! We have an NSPP.*”

### **4.3.3 A Limited Understanding of Social Protection**

30 The fact that stakeholders have only a limited understanding of what constitutes social protection has led to gaps in the formulation of the NSPP. A senior official of the Ministry of Social Action, for example, said, “*It was really a new concept and you need a certain vision for that. When you don’t know something and then they ask you where you want to go. You don’t even know where it is or how far away. It’s rather difficult.*” For a representative of the Ministry of National Education, “*The main difficulty was a new way of seeing things. People didn’t really understand, so people didn’t really know, what social protection even is. So far, it’s not so obvious to some people.*” The inability of some national stakeholders to explain the link between social protection and certain instruments of the NSPP illustrates the conceptual misunderstanding that has prevailed.

31The NSPP document was mainly drafted by members of the Executive Secretariat, who had an inadequate understanding and conceptual knowledge of the components and instruments of social protection. Most stakeholders systematically equated social protection with cash transfer programmes. According to one TFP, *"At the time, it wasn't easy when social protection was being discussed. For them, social protection is essentially about cash transfer."*

32Some of the stakeholders were coming across the concept for the first time, since they had never been trained in social protection. A member of the commission in charge of social safety nets said, *"I don't know about social protection training specifically."* Others found their training insufficient to give them an understanding of social protection. According to a member of the commission in charge of national insurance: *"It's true, there have been workshops, but it takes more than a couple of days to turn someone into a social protection specialist."*

33In short, the stakeholders lacked guidance and clarification on the changes desired by the political decision makers and the senior administration. This situation, the result of a lack of knowledge of social protection issues and an ambiguous political will, favoured the emergence of a context of formulation conducive to 'non-design' (Figure 4).

Figure 4. A context conducive to a 'non-design' type of formulation in Burkina Faso



[Zoom Original \(png, 146k\)](#)

Source: The authors.

34The following section presents the stakeholders' logics in this 'non-design' type of formulation process.

## **4.4. Stakeholders' Logics in the 'Non-design' Type of Formulation Process**

35In the absence of government guidance, the stakeholders involved in the formulation process acted according to their own logics. These are understood here as 'the various lines of consistency that the observer deduces from an empirical observation of sets of particular differential practices, without any theoretical pre-judgment' (Olivier de Sardan, 1995, 127).

### **4.4.1 The Logic of National Stakeholders**

36Three types of logic—which showed themselves in different ways depending on the level of decision—guided the reasoning of national stakeholders.

37**The search for consensus.** The desire to obtain a consensual document and a social protection strategy with which each party could identify guided the reasoning. The members of the specialised committees were mostly from the sectoral ministries, and the SGs responsible for each commission tried to exclude none of the other ministries. The content of the report of the commission in charge of social

safety nets was decided according to this principle. According to one participant in this commission, *"To say that decisions were reached would be overstating it, but it was a work of consensus. As it was necessary that each person could have something in it [i.e. see his or her proposals taken into account]."* The Executive Secretariat also attempted to produce an NSPP reflecting the content of the reports of the two commissions, in order to satisfy sectoral ministries and partners. One interlocutor, convinced that the lack of consistency of the document stemmed from a desire to satisfy all the stakeholders, said the following: *"In my view, as for the NSPP that you have there, it's the consensus that led to it. They want everyone to say: I was consulted, it was a participative process, that's all."*

**38 Preserving the resources acquired.** This logic, a corollary of the previous one, consists in perpetuating the strategies already implemented by the ministries in order to preserve budget lines, whatever their efficiency. The integration of interventions regarding greater consistency was not to be envisaged as it might have led to a department being deprived of the management of certain programmes and the associated resources, which are considered as assets. This logic guided the specialised commissions and the Executive Secretariat, which were keen to maintain strategies already funded or associated with funding pledges from partners. The representatives of the ministries displayed vigilance in taking into account the actions and steering projects of the TFPs, in the hope of mobilising additional resources for an extension at the national level. One representative of the Ministry of National Education said, *"When you look at what WFP does, it's been taken back into politics, so that it can be extended to more households. Food transfers, canteens, etc. Cash transfers."* The Ministry of Labour and Social Security and the support structures for mutual health insurance were already involved in the national reflection on the creation of the universal health insurance scheme (UHIP). These structures strongly encouraged the inclusion of the UHIP in the NSPP, in the hope of securing state support for mutual health funds. According to a senior official from this Ministry, *"There are all those people who gave a view about the mutuals who wanted in any case to see the health insurance included in the NSPP, because it would give a great impetus to boost the mutual."*

**39 Attracting new financial resources.** This was a question of taking into account the new strategies in vogue in order to, in due course, be eligible for financing. According to a member of the Steering Committee, the drafting of policies *"was also about placing the bait so that people would provide the funding."* A member of the Executive Secretariat expressed this idea in these terms: *"People are often looking for financial resources. So, strategically, we don't like closing the door to certain partners. So we include practically everything, so that when a partner comes he can find himself. So, really, that's how it is."*

#### **4.4.2 The Logic of the Group of Technical and Financial Partners**

**40** Two types of logic guided the action of the TFPs.

**41 The implementation of their institutional mandate.** The TFPs guided the discussions and made suggestions in order that their central interests and visions be taken into account. For one member of the Secretariat, *"Everyone came with his ideas and wanted them to be expressed. Donors were looking to see if their specificity was reflected in the document."* For example, UNICEF encouraged the development of a coherent and integrated NSPP, but it gave more importance to the social protection of the mother and the child. A member of the TFP group explained that, *"UNICEF is committed to protecting the child and the mother at all costs. You cannot have the support of UNICEF if this aspect is not taken into account."*

**42 Promotion of social protection instruments.** To implement social protection, each TFP generally favours an instrument linked to its values and institutional mandate. In the formulation process, the logic of instrumental promotion has often guided TFPs. Non-priority strategies for national stakeholders were included in the NSPP because they were priorities for a TFP. According to one member of the Editorial Secretariat, *"UNICEF was there. The document had to take into account the question of childhood, to ensure them that services would be free, for example pre-schooling, which was not a priority for us."* A member of the Commission in charge of national insurance recounted his experience as follows: *"It wasn't easy. Because everyone was fighting, the International Labour Office (ILO) just wanted to see the social protection floor in order to be satisfied. The World Bank wanted to see the cash transfer; in fact, UNICEF wanted... and everyone managed to get his stuff put in."* A member of the TFP

group set out the reasoning in these terms: “*The World Food Programme (WFP) said, we must add school canteens; we added school canteens. We’ve managed, we said, to get free care, it’s essential for social protection. The distribution of cash to poor households regardless of whether or not it is on a regular or irregular basis, is an element of social policy, so everyone came along with his or her idea.*”

## **5. Discussion: Policy Formulation and Appropriation by Stakeholders**

43Our results show that the formulation process was influenced by logics other than the choice of content based on the ability of the solutions to produce the desired changes, thus giving rise to an empirical finding of ‘non-design’ (Howlett and Mukherjee, 2014). The stakeholders did not go on to assess the capacity of each solution or instrument to produce the desired changes in the context of Burkina Faso.

### **5.1 Government Leadership and Stakeholder Competence**

44The mechanism for development of the NSPP, made the responsibility of the MEF, a politically strong ministry, was seen as a genuine commitment by the government to support the process. In hindsight, this support can be described as merely rhetorical since the members of the inter-ministerial committee (high-level decision makers) were barely involved in this process entirely financed from outside. In the absence of state participation, the interests of the beneficiaries took a back seat. The NSPP aimed to gradually set up an SPF. But the minimum package of basic services to be guaranteed was not clearly defined since the ISC—whose mandate was to define the broad outlines of a coherent policy—did not play its role. As a result, strategic objectives were unclear and strategic options were not evaluated.

45As in Malawi (Chinsinga, 2007), another low-income country, the government did not provide clear strategic and technical orientation to guide the development process. In Cambodia—a middle-income country—meanwhile, a government-led inter-ministerial committee guided decision-making on the minimum to be guaranteed in the SPF. But the weakness of civil servants’ technical skills meant the government could not exert the necessary influence on technical decisions; this task was entrusted to the stakeholders of the international organisations that provided the expertise (Kwon et al., 2015). Similarly, in Malawi conceptual shortcomings undermined the definition of social protection adapted to the local social context. The government used consultants paid by the World Bank and UNICEF to support the policymaking process (Chibwana et al., 2009). The study also revealed that high-level policymakers and officials in Burkina Faso had limited conceptual knowledge and technical skills. Work was therefore conducted by national stakeholders, with more or less prescriptive support from TFPs.

46The logics of seeking consensus, preserving assets, and attracting resources have often favoured an undifferentiated recognition of the preferences and interests of TFPs. Regardless of the context, the fact that national stakeholders have insufficient skills and knowledge in the domain of social protection seems to favour the intervention of international organisations in the process of formulation.

### **5.2 Government Leadership and the Intention of Formulating or Appropriating Policies**

- 1 Appropriation is an ‘ambiguous, vague and hermetic concept’ (Saliba-Couture, 2011). Here, it refers (سي).

47The mobilisation of the domestic resources necessary for the long-term financing of the NSPP was rarely raised during the discussions. Moreover, no representative of the parliament was involved in the formulation of this policy, even though social protection presupposes an allocation of resources under the aegis of this institution. The NSPP mentions the setting up of a solidarity fund, but does not explicitly

specify the contribution of the state in this matter. On the other hand, it calls on TFPs to contribute financially. It therefore seems that the limited technical skills of public servants are not the only factor explaining the inadequacy of government guidance; this could have resulted from a lack of any intention to formulate and appropriate<sup>1</sup> the policy, illustrated in particular by a certain reluctance to support the NSPP.

<sup>48</sup>This lack of commitment could be linked, on the one hand, to the nature of the problem that NSPP is supposed to solve—the deficit in social protection—and, on the other hand, to the category of beneficiaries concerned, namely the poor and vulnerable, a category with fuzzy outlines. The NSPP defines its beneficiaries as people without resources and unable to withstand an economic shock (Kadio et al., 2018). But this population was apparently not a priority for the government of the day. The Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Sustainable Development (SCADD)—the country’s development benchmark, adopted in 2011—strongly recommended the development of an NSPP with the aim of improving the social protection of poor and vulnerable people. However, it explicitly stated that young people aged between 15 and 35 “currently comprise a particularly vulnerable group.” In addition, between 2009 and 2012, with the support of the ILO and the European Union, the government developed a strategy to “build an SPF and promote access to decent work for young women and young men in situations of no employment or underemployment, and the poor and vulnerable” (ILO, 2012a, 19). This strategy, unlike the NSPP, provided for the establishment of basic services that would constitute an SPF for young people in situations of no employment or underemployment. In addition, a review of social protection expenditure and performance has identified avenues for resource mobilisation (ILO, 2012b). Choices were made following discussions and the evaluation of options. It is thus interesting to note that this strategy was developed at the same time as the NSPP.

<sup>49</sup>In fact, the decision to formulate an NSPP was taken in the context of finding solutions to mitigate social tensions (Kadio et al., 2018). The government was aware of the possible consequences of mass youth unemployment for social cohesion and political stability, hence its ambiguous and hesitant attitude when it came to appropriating the NSPP—that is, deciding on guaranteed minimums for poor and vulnerable people at the expense of investing in youth social protection. An ILO report referred to the idea that an SPF for young people would be a relevant solution in a context where unemployment among young people aged 15 to 35 was a source of social unrest and instability (ILO, 2012a). The 2014 popular uprising suggests that the issue of youth employment was the government’s top priority. The ‘insurgents’—those who actively participated in the demonstrations that led to the collapse of the government—had many young people and women in their ranks (Hagberg et al., 2017). The issue of work was central to their concerns, and they perceived the lack of jobs as a lack of political will (Frintz, 2014).

## **5.3 The Usefulness of the Concept of ‘Non-design’**

- <sup>2</sup> Three types of capacity are particularly important: the governance capacity of the state (its abili (...))

<sup>50</sup>Conceptual writings describe the ‘non-design’ type of formulation process as a decision-making process based on a random evaluation of options or as a highly subordinate process involving negotiations, haggling, or clientelism, and one which ignores the logical relations between policy components as a solution to problems (Chindarkar, 2017; Dryzek, 1983; Howlett and Mukherjee, 2014). Moreover, a space of formulation is conducive to ‘non-design’ when two conditions are met: on the one hand, a lack of intention on the part of the government to adopt a policy capable of solving a specific problem and, on the other hand, lack of capacities<sup>2</sup> or skills on the part of both the agencies responsible for formulation and the government (Chindarkar, 2017; Chindarkar et al., 2017; Howlett and Ramesh, 2016). Empirical knowledge about ‘non-design’ is scarce, particularly in the area of social policies (Chindarkar et al., 2017), where research has focused on the nature of problems, the assessment of implementation and the analysis of the institutional and political determinants of choices and results. To our knowledge, this study is the first to use this concept in the African context. It has undeniably been useful in the analysis of the Burkina Faso NSPP. We found empirically that the managers and senior officials concerned had insufficient technical expertise, but also that the government had shown little

intention to formulate the policy, presumably because its beneficiaries were of only limited political interest. Thus, beyond the involvement of the TFPs, which could have compensated for the limited capacity of local stakeholders, the government has done little to find solutions adapted to the needs of the beneficiaries. Without the appropriation of high-level decision makers, the prevailing logic is one that has the potential to negatively influence the quality of social protection policies. We have also noted the specific logics of our research that complement those already highlighted in work done on a more microscopic scale in Burkina Faso (Ridde, 2011). In order to set up programmes for social safety nets or national insurance, a government's expression of a genuine desire for change is a prerequisite for the technical support of TFPs. Thus, our results provide an original empirical contribution to reflection on the conditions of a 'non-design' situation in Francophone Africa. Further studies applying this concept in other contexts and continuing the analysis of its heuristic validity should emerge in Africa. This analytical perspective is indeed relevant for African countries that have launched social protection reforms. To ensure its transition to universal health coverage, for example, Senegal has assembled various existing initiatives to construct a social health protection policy "without any consistency or any real link between them" (Alenda-Demoutiez 2016, 177). Thanks to the 'policy design' perspective, it would be possible to identify both the contextual factors favouring shortcomings in formulation and the logics of stakeholders, but also to improve the efficiency of future policies.

## **6. Conclusion**

51 We have reviewed the formulation process of the Burkina Faso NSPP. According to Sherpherd et al. (2004), social protection policies must be governed by a number of principles. Political options must respond to the needs of the people, the realities and the living conditions of those for whom they were designed; be sustainable and affordable for the public budget; and not overburden households and communities. This research shows that the political interest of the government and the capacity of the stakeholders have influenced the quality of the policy and the choice of its content. The process involved negotiations between stakeholders with diverse expertise and influences, and the government's stated intention in this area has remained at a purely verbal level due to a lack of appropriation. In this context, the participants in the process (a multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral group) have deployed logics guided neither by an understanding of the problem nor by an analysis of its root causes. Nor have they been guided by a choice based on a systematic analysis of the ability of solutions to solve the problem. The NSPP has come down to an all-purpose document. The shortcomings that led to the 'non-design' situation could lead to implementation difficulties, or even inefficiency. The study highlights important elements to be taken into account in policy making in Burkina Faso and other West African countries engaged in similar processes. Beyond the inter-ministerial participative processes, stakeholders must be able to carry out a systemic reflection, without the sectoral logic of any of them prevailing over the general vision. Leadership and the political will to solve a problem are important to channel the respective interests of stakeholders and to manage the contradictions that can hinder the formulation of a coherent policy adapted to the needs of the beneficiaries. Despite the expertise of TFPs, the formulation of an effective policy requires a real involvement on the part of national stakeholders (government and civil society). Taking into account factors that favour 'non-design' will help to improve the formulation of future social protection policies so that they are more effective and relevant.

## **List of initialisms**

52 NSPP: National Social Protection Policy

53 MEF: Ministry of Economy and Finance

54 TFP: Technical and financial partner

55 SG: Secretary General

56 ISC: Inter-ministerial Steering Committee

57 SPF: Social protection floor

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NOTES

**1** Appropriation is an 'ambiguous, vague and hermetic concept' (Saliba-Couture, 2011). Here, it refers to a situation in which the government makes its own choices and ensures the implementation and funding of the project, with the support of TFP funding.

**2** Three types of capacity are particularly important: the governance capacity of the state (its ability to understand the needs of stakeholders, to respond to them and to judge the political feasibility of different choices); the analytical capacity of the authors of the text of the policy (an in-depth knowledge of problem identification methods, data collection techniques necessary for the formulation of solutions, and technical analysis methods for evaluating options and the impact of the policies selected); and the organisational capacity of the authors (management, leadership and communication skills).

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS



Title **Figure 1. Institutional mechanism for formulating the NSPP.**

Credits Source: The authors.

URL <http://journals.openedition.org/poldev/docannexe/image/3161/img-1.png>

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Title **Figure 2. Chronology of the development steps of the NSPP**

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Title **Figure 3. NSPP 2012**

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Title **Figure 4. A context conducive to a ‘non-design’ type of formulation in Burkina Faso**



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