

The Dynamics of Building Political Support for Social Protection in Uganda: issues, opportunities & challenges

Presented at conference on “Escaping Poverty Traps: Connecting the Chronically Poor to the Economic Growth Agenda”

Washington DC: 26th – 27th February 2009

By

Charles Lwanga-Ntale

Development Research & Training
& Chronic Poverty Research Centre

Five (5) things we can't ignore today:

- (1) Chronic food insecurity with recent food crisis, shortages & price hikes being indicators
- (2) High levels of vulnerability alongside deep-seated poverty and inequality
- (3) A Global Financial Crisis → wiped assets; limited options
- (4) Heightened conflict and global insecurity (including resources-based conflict)
- (5) Turning point in global leadership

..... **All have a “political” dimension**

Concluding note? Or a summary?

To achieve SP goals

- Will require political “opportunities to be recognised and seized”
- We will have to move beyond mere recognition of “the need for SP” .. to understanding, engaging with, and providing stimulants for the political process
- The state will need to develop a “**political contract**” with its citizens and all key constituents
- We should clearly identify and assess key political factors which the chronically can use as “levers” to engage the political leadership

So what is the story behind SP policy & practice in Uganda?

- A story of “a chaos of purposes”
- A story of “technocratic Vs political”
- A story of “market Vs redistributive” proponents
- A story of deep-seated attitudes

The Uganda Story – The Problem

- 2002-3: Vulnerability and persistence of poverty highlighted in reports/surveys (PPA; HBS; DHS)
- 2003: Chronic Poverty acknowledged in Uganda as a key development concern (following years of denial/resistance) → suggestions made about SP (included in PRSP as “X-cutting issue”)
- 2005: Uganda Chronic Poverty Report made strong case for SP → Task Force ==> Some ideas (including a Pilot Cash Transfer)
- MFPED and “economic team” resist → prefer “productive sectors” (passively and actively); Ministry of Social Development “politically weak”

The story continues

MFPED argument was that SP

- (a) Is not affordable
- (b) Diverts financial resources from productive sectors
- (c) Cannot be efficiently implemented due to possible leakages
- (d) Creates dependency

Or

- “There is no capacity to conceptualise, design or implement complex SP programmes”

But the true story?

- Gap between hope and idealism of Social Development professionals, pessimism of economists and “deep-rooted –ve attitudes of political elite” + limited trust in local institutions

Yet actual reasons for failure to invest was
due to

Political factors related to:

(1) the dominant economic paradigm

(2) Elite attitudes

(3) Organisation, management and systems

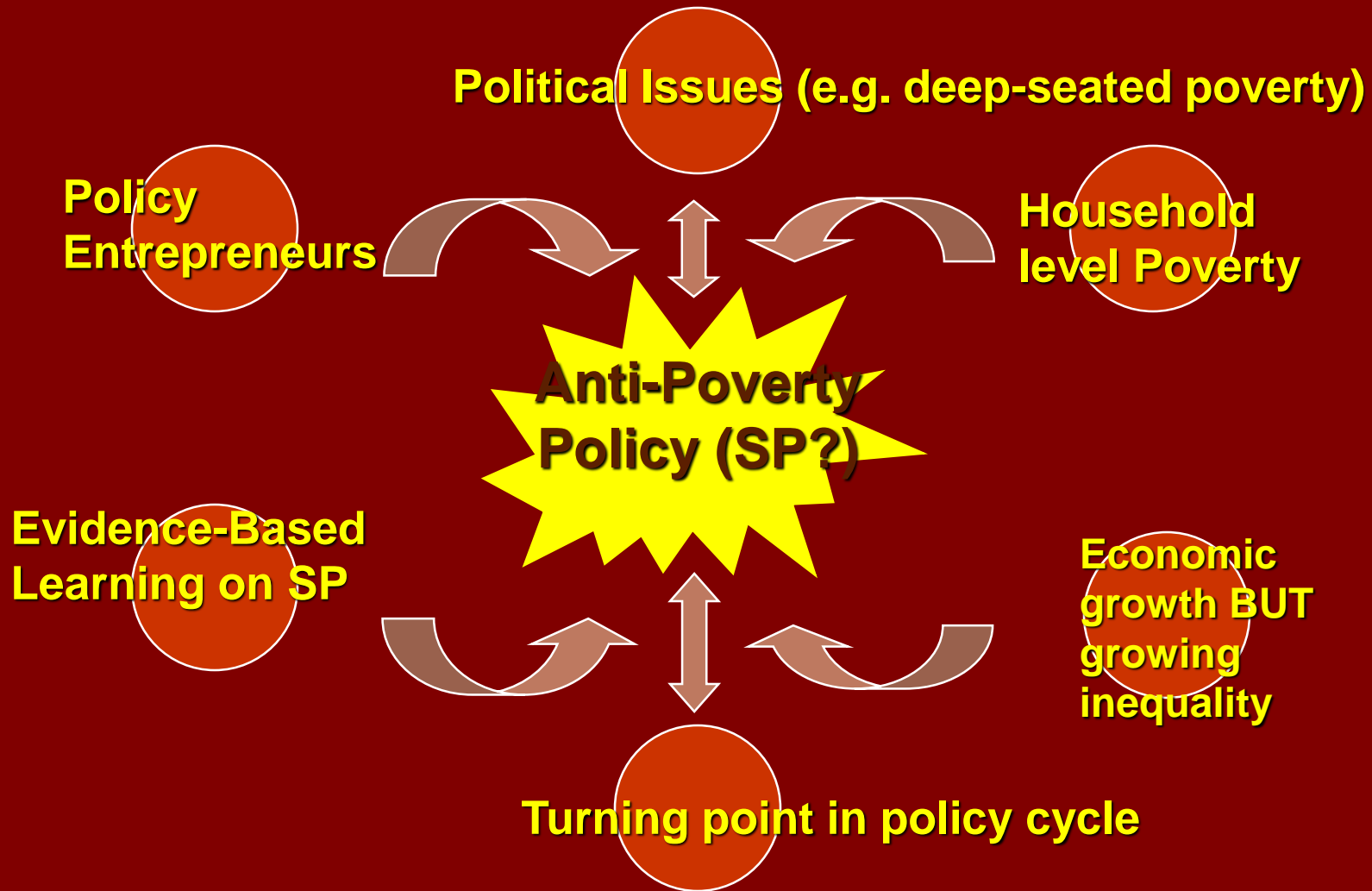
And fundamentally ... Uganda's political elites are more pre-occupied with "political survival" than with concerns of the poor

Recall however that

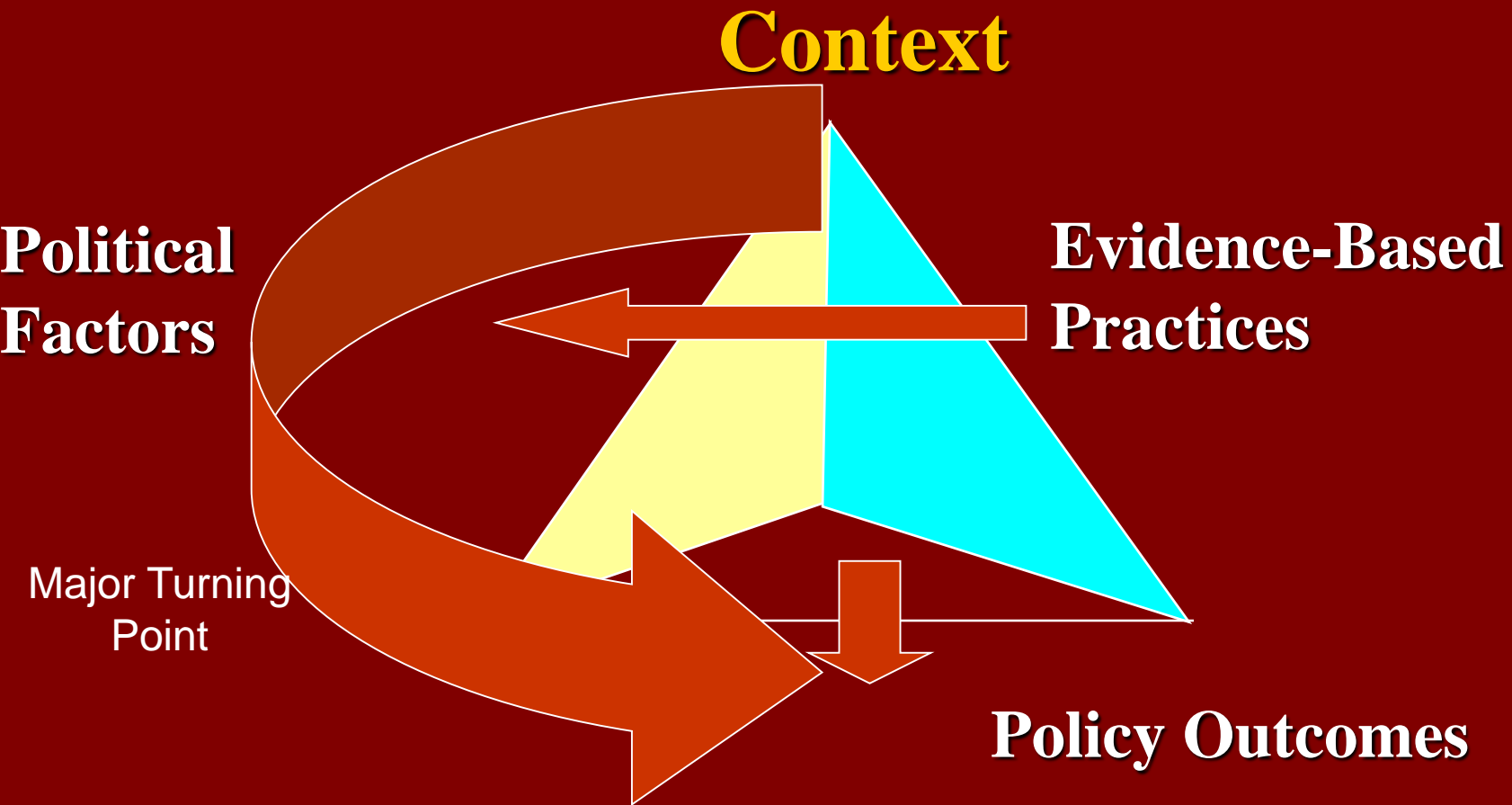
- Uganda's policy-makers are not a coherent rational political lot → policy decisions not based on predictable rational process (MSD Vs MFPEd)
- The policy-makers are “realists” or “opportunists” → responding to issues of relative power and prevailing circumstances of the time

The policy change process

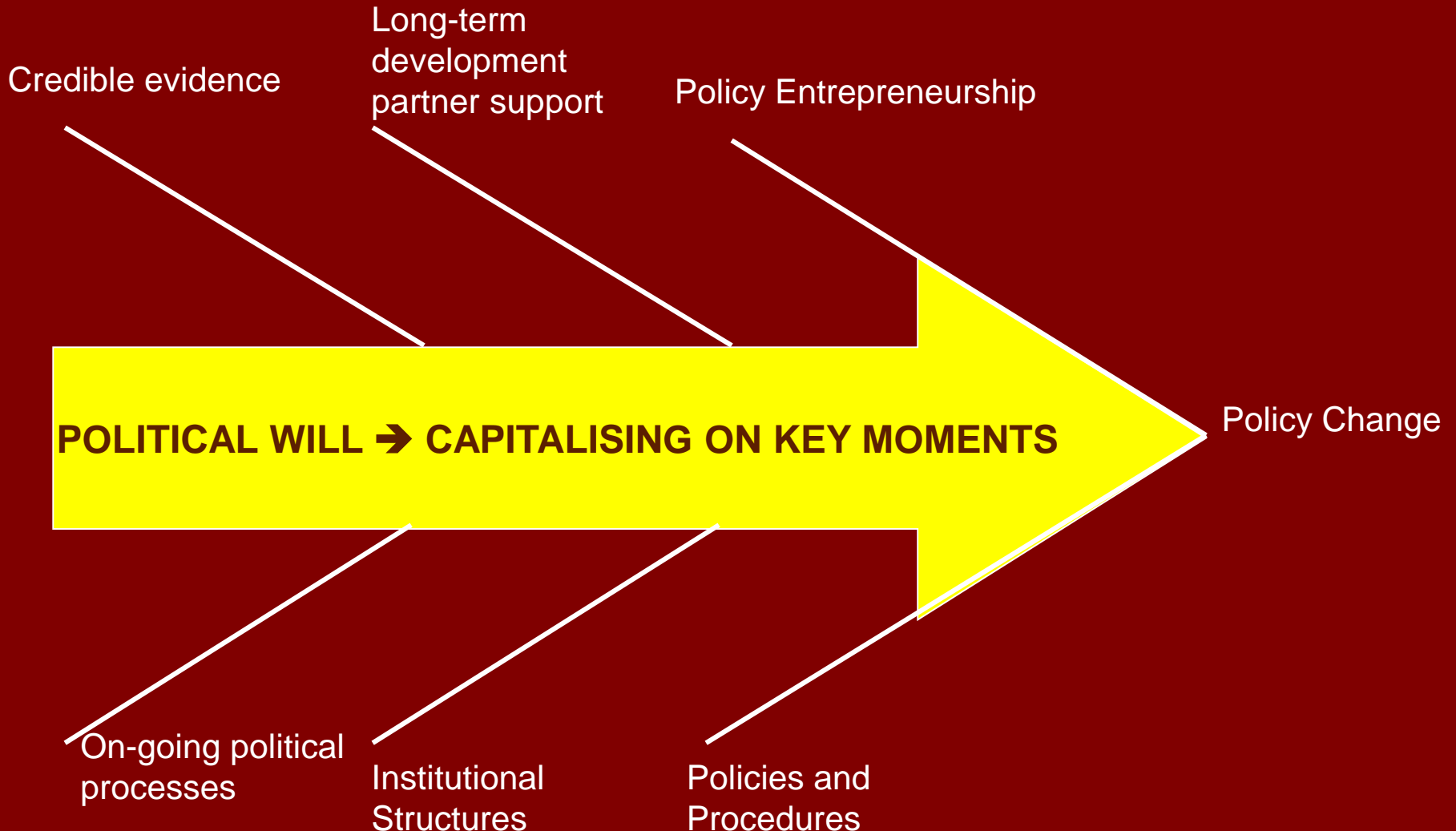
Transformation



The Policy Change Pyramid



Lessons Learned from the Uganda Social Protection Policy Process



Another conclusion? Post-Script

- If a substantial amount of assistance is right to aid or “bail out” large companies that have become “vulnerable”, it is perhaps in order for vulnerable individual households to be “aided out of trouble” → so that they can contribute to economic growth
- This is a political question

Finally

I guess you're right on the economics, but those taxes were never a problem of economics. They are politics all the way through. We put those payroll contributions there so as to give the contributors a legal, moral, and political right to collect their pensions and their unemployment benefits. With those taxes in there, no damn politician can ever scrap my social security program.

- Franklin Delano Roosevelt

(Cited in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Coming of the New Deal*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958).