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Assessment of the Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty programme in Karaga district, Ghana

Mohammed Sulemana, Bukari Francis Issahaku Malongza and Mohammed Abdulai

ABSTRACT

This article assesses the contribution of the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme in reducing rural poverty in the Karaga district of Northern Ghana, using a mixed research design to compare the livelihoods of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. It concludes that the programme is contributing to poverty reduction among the poor and vulnerable, and recommends that school children benefiting from LEAP should be exempted from paying extra expenses such as examination and PTA fees. There should also be a system to provide subsidies for agriculture inputs to enable beneficiaries to engage in agriculture to promote longer term poverty alleviation.

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Introduction

The last two decades have witnessed a number of countries in the developing world, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa, demonstrating a keen interest in designing and implementing social protection programmes as a strategy for fighting chronic poverty and deprivation (Handa and Park 2012). There are many different definitions of social protection. The International Labour Organization (2010, 19) defines social protection as about “*having security in the face of vulnerabilities and contingencies, it is having access to health care and it is about working in safety*”. Social protection has widely been recognised as a means of overcoming social exclusion and promoting poverty reduction (ILO 2010) and is a system in which the state or civil society puts in place a social safety net for the marginalised and vulnerable in society (Chapman 2006). In this article, social protection follows the definition of “*all public and private initiatives that provide income or consumption transfers to the poor, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks and enhance the social status and rights of the marginalised; with the overall objective of reducing the economic and social vulnerability of poor, vulnerable and marginalised groups*” (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2007).

Social protection can, therefore, be conceptualised as a process of integrating the interests of the poor, excluded, vulnerable, and marginalised into the functioning areas of society. These areas have been identified as the labour market, economy, society, culture, citizenship, education, health and income groups (Chapman 2006; Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2007).

Social grants or cash transfers, according to Abbey, Odonkor, and Boateng (2014), are widely acknowledged as one of the many tools for implementing social protection programmes. Samson, Niekerk, and Quene (2006) define cash-based social transfers as regular non-contributory payments of money provided by government or NGOs to individuals or households, with the aim of decreasing chronic or shock-induced poverty, addressing social risk, and reducing economic vulnerability. Social cash transfers, therefore, have the potential of directly tackling income poverty and its implications on the realisation of broader development objectives.

Success stories from Brazil, Turkey, South Africa, and Mexico, among others, inspired the adoption of social cash transfer schemes (SCTS) as a mechanism for addressing extreme poverty in Ghana. The idea behind most social protection programmes in Ghana was to reduce inequality and poverty by subsidising the provision of basic social services such as education, health, water, and sanitation (Voice 2011).

There have been many studies carried out on the impact of SCTS. Owusu-Addo (2016) noted that through the provision of cash grants, the programme has contributed to improved child nutrition, education, health service utilisation, poverty reduction and social transformation, and improved emotional health and well-being. Handa et al. (2014) found that LEAP (Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty) has increased access to schooling at the secondary level, and at all levels has improved the quality of access, with fewer days missed and less grade repetition. There were also strong impacts on enrolment in the NHIS, an explicit objective of LEAP. However, they found no impact on consumption and savings and increased enrolment in LEAP has not led to an increase in curative care-seeking behaviour. Handa et al. (2016a) concluded that among very poor households, impacts on total consumption are about equal to the per capita value of the transfer. Handa et al. (2016b), studying unconditional cash transfer in Zambia, found that *“unconditional and paid bimonthly cash transfer has wide-ranging effects on ultra-poor households in rural Zambia, significantly raising consumption, food security and children’s schooling and material well-being, while at the same time strengthening economic capacity and assets”*. Miller, Tsoka, and Reichart (2011) studied the SCTS in Malawi and concluded that *“The SCTP has achieved its primary objective of ensuring food security and consumption among the ultra-poor labour-constrained households, with larger impacts amongst the very poorest”*. Miller et al. (2010) examined the potential of the SCTS in Malawi to interrupt the intergenerational cycle of poverty in ultra-poor and labour-constrained households. Participants in a focus group discussion (FGD) reported that the cash allowed them to access goods and materials, including food, healthcare, school supplies, clothing, blankets, housing, and livestock.

Although Karaga district is one of the pilot districts of LEAP, there is little academic research on the impact of LEAP and other policy influences in the district to inform the rethinking of development policy and practice. Therefore, this article sought to assess the contribution of LEAP in reducing poverty among poor and vulnerable families in Karaga district in the areas of hunger and food insecurity, health, educational enrolment and retention, agriculture production, savings and investment, and social inclusion of the excluded. It also aimed to contribute to the debate whether a cash transfer scheme is a better option to addressing vulnerability and poverty in rural Ghana. This was achieved by addressing the following research questions and hypotheses. How does the LEAP cash transfer contribute to poverty reduction? The null hypothesis is (H_0): access to LEAP cash transfer does not predict change in beneficiary income; the alternate hypothesis is (H_1): access to LEAP cash transfer predicts change in beneficiary income. This paper is also distinguished because it compares the effects of cash transfers on poverty between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries with similar characteristics.

Overview of the LEAP programme in Ghana

The LEAP programme is a social cash transfer programme that provides cash and health insurance to extremely poor households across the country (MoGCSP 2016). The government of Ghana adopted a number of initiatives, including the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) in 2007. This represented the government’s vision of creating an all-inclusive society through the provision of sustainable mechanisms to protect persons living in situations of extreme poverty, vulnerability, and exclusion (MoGCSP 2016). LEAP was launched in 2008 with the aim to empower the poorest of the poor to enable them move out of their poverty and vulnerability. Its focus is to alleviate short-term poverty and encourage long-term human capital development. LEAP was the flagship programme of the NSPS. Three main components were designed to tackle extreme poverty: the establishment of a new social grant scheme to provide a basic and secure income for the most vulnerable

households, better poverty targeting of existing social protection programmes, and a package of complementary inputs for beneficiaries of social protection programmes.

The target beneficiaries of LEAP are extremely poor households in Ghana. Extreme poverty has been defined by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS 2014) as those whose standard of living is insufficient to meet their basic nutritional requirements even if they devoted their entire consumption budget to food. The targeting process is based on a community-oriented approach and then later verified centrally with a proxy means test. Thus, during the process of selecting beneficiary households, a community LEAP implementation committee (CLIC) identifies beneficiary households that are then verified by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP).

The LEAP grant is unconditional for the disabled and the elderly. However, although not part of an enforceable monitoring system, careers of orphaned or vulnerable children (OVC) are expected to adhere to certain conditions, which include:

1. Enrolment and retention of school-age children in school
2. Birth registration of new-born babies and their attendance at postnatal clinics
3. Full vaccination of children up to the age of five
4. The non-trafficking of children and ensuring their non-engagement in the "worst forms" of child labour (MoGCSP 2018).

LEAP employs a bimonthly payment structure and payments depend on the number of eligible beneficiaries per household. LEAP started a nationwide electronic payment in 2016 using "e-zwich" cards, banking cards encoded with biometric data that allow withdrawal at a payment point or in any e-zwich ATM using your fingerprint (MoGCSP 2018).

At its inception in 2008, the transfer size was GH¢8–GH¢15 (US\$1 is approximately GH¢4.78). This was increased in 2010 (to GH¢16–GH¢30), in 2013 (GH¢48–GH¢90), and again in 2015 (GH¢64–GH¢106). The current transfer payment structure is GH¢64 to households with one eligible beneficiary; GH¢76 to households with two eligible beneficiaries; GH¢88 to households with three eligible beneficiaries; and GH¢106 to households with four or more eligible beneficiaries. LEAP beneficiaries increased from 1654 households in 21 districts in 2008 to 213,048 households by September 2016 in all the 216 districts of Ghana (MoGCSP 2018).

Theoretical and conceptual perspectives of social protectionism

This section presents the theories underpinning the study and how these aid in the understanding of the phenomenon investigated. The study uses the theory of justice as fairness as its analytical trajectory. This theory was postulated by David Rawls to address problems of distributive justice. It has three main tenets. The first explains that social stratification should offer liberty to all members without anyone infringing on the liberty of others. The second premises that in a society of unequal economic and social opportunities, conditions should be created for those who are worse off to be better than what they would have been if conditions of equal distribution of resources prevailed. Finally, that there should be possibilities for the poor in society to have access to power over decision making or hold public office (Voice 2011).

In Ghana, the application of the issue of liberty had an international context, specifically under the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative in 2003, during which the World Bank and other foreign creditors wrote off Ghana's debts. In line with the second tenet of the theory of justice as fairness, in 2008, the LEAP programme and Government's responsibility to pay national health insurance premiums for hard-core poor people, pregnant women and children under 18 years, and also recently under LEAP 1000, in which poor pregnant and lactating mothers are paid grants every two months to improve the nutritional status of mothers and babies, aimed to give equal opportunities to people considered worse off (MoGCSP 2016). What remains weakly explored is how access to power over

decision making or public office is enforced for the vulnerable in Ghana. These together aim at livelihood improvement.

Specific aspects of livelihood improvement fall under the concept of social protection. This concerns policies and programmes that help to mitigate vulnerability to poverty using a set of protective actions for the promotion of economic and social liberties and capacities. It targets vulnerable people such as the sick, disabled, and aged, and includes protective measures such as health and unemployment insurance as social insurance, cash transfers to vulnerable people as social assistance, and labour market interventions through regulations for worker protection (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development 2010).

In this study, the theory of justice as fairness, which generates the concept of social protection, was used to evaluate LEAP and its impact on people's economic and social well-being. Socially, it investigated into whether the LEAP programme brings about improvement in beneficiaries' access to health, sufficient food, and education, as well as participation in decision making. These constitute the indicators of changes in livelihoods by enhancing economic capabilities of beneficiaries for survival and to avoid poverty. Economically, it explored the main inputs such as financial and physical capital: how the cash grant as financial capital could be used to acquire physical capital, such as simple farm tools and petty trading accoutrements. These influence the indicators. The study extended to include the impact of improved livelihood on the liberty to participate in other cultural community activities, such as initiation rites (naming ceremonies, weddings, funerals) and festivals. Thus, the main dependent variable generated from the theory is livelihood, and the main independent variable generated from the concept of social protection is cash transfer from the LEAP programme.

Study setting

Karaga district is one of the 26 administrative districts of the Northern Region of Ghana carved out of the then Gushegu/Karaga District in 2004. It is located in the north-eastern part of the Northern Region and Karaga, the district capital, is 94 km from Tamale, the regional capital. It has a population of 77,707, comprising 52% females and 48% males, with an average household size of 10, compared to eight for the Northern Region (Ghana Statistical Service 2016). There are 182 communities in the district, with Karaga as the only urban town. About 82% of the population resides in rural communities. Agriculture employs 87.6% of the total population (Ghana Statistical Service 2014). As district with a largely rural and agrarian population, with large household sizes and benefiting from LEAP, it is a good study site for investigation into the contribution of LEAP in reducing rural poverty.

Research methodology

This study used the concurrent triangulation mixed research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches of data collection and analysis. Quantitatively, structured interview guides were used for individual respondents at the household level. This was to eliminate challenges of illiterate respondents not being able to read and write responses if questionnaires were used. Questions were largely close-ended to facilitate quantitative data acquisition and analysis. Thematic issues covered in the interviews were the effects of LEAP cash grants on poverty reduction. LEAP beneficiaries are households with eligible members such as OVC, persons 65 years or older, and disabled people incapable of working. Eligibility is by a household having persons in one or more of these categories. Accordingly, household heads constituted the sampling units, because payment is either made to them or to a person who falls within a category of beneficiaries if he/she is a single member household.

We define the household head as the breadwinner of a family unit. Thus 97 household heads constituted the sample size, determined by Taro's formula, with a sample frame of 3,054 and a margin of error of 0.1. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency distribution tables

and charts) and inferential statistics (linear regression analysis). Sample proportions were calculated for each community and snowballing used to obtain beneficiary households in each community for data collection. Another 97 respondents who were in the category of beneficiaries but not benefiting were selected from households in each community by accidental sampling, and interview guides administered to them for the purpose of comparative analysis.

Qualitatively, 22 FGDs were organised for participants from 11 study communities, selected by systematic sampling out of 77 total beneficiary communities. Each of the 11 study communities had one male and one female group of LEAP beneficiary participants for FGDs. The number of participants ranged between 6 and 12 for each group, with household heads who had members in the category of LEAP beneficiaries, and also persons in the category of LEAP beneficiaries who were also household heads.

Locally influential persons such as assemblymen assisted in the selection of the FGD participants. Discussions covered the thematic issues of the research questions and the issues in the household interviews, as a principle of the adopted research design. Key informant interview guides were also administered to 11 community LEAP focal persons, one representative for each study community, five district LEAP implementation committee members, one for each of the five area councils of Karaga district, as well as the District Director of the Department of Social Developments. All key informants were purposively selected. Qualitative data were presented by means of direct quotations and analysed by verbal explanations, narrations and supported by hermeneutics or linkage to published research findings.

Results and discussion

This section presents the results, including the respondents selected across the study communities, and discussion of analytical themes related to the research questions and hypotheses. Table 1 shows that as of 2017, there were 2,462 LEAP beneficiaries in the 11 communities of the Karaga district selected for the study. The figures were based on the nearest whole number from the computations. Of the sample size of 97, Nyong and Pishigu had the highest proportions of 14 respondents, as they also had the highest number of beneficiaries (350 each). An equal number of non-beneficiary respondents were selected for these communities for comparative purposes.

Interviews with the District Director of Social Developments, as well as the community and district LEAP implementation committee members, indicated that the number of beneficiaries per community depended on the number of people who fall in the category of LEAP target beneficiaries relative to other communities, and not the size of the population *per se*. This, according to Voice (2011), is the

Table 1. Proportional distribution of household respondents across the communities.

Communities	Number of beneficiary households (<i>b</i>) as at 2017	Proportion of beneficiary household heads relative to total household heads selected ($b/B \times S$)	Number of qualified but non-beneficiaries selected accidentally
Tong	280	11	11
Sung	180	7	7
Nyong	350	14	14
Bagurigu	250	10	10
Tamaligu	150	6	6
Zankali	141	5	5
Pishigu	350	14	14
Kpataribogu	170	7	7
Komoayili	280	11	11
Bagli	151	6	6
Zandua	162	6	6
Total (<i>B</i>)	2462	97	97

Notes: *b* = number of beneficiary households per community; *B* = total number of beneficiary households in all the study communities; *S* = sample size.

Source: Field data (2017).

evidence of high vulnerability to poverty and so necessitates the need to institute social protection programmes that ensure equity in the distribution of resources.

Beneficiaries of the LEAP cash transfer

The District Director of Social Development revealed that LEAP targeting criteria in the district are based on poverty and having a household member in at least one of four demographic categories: households with orphan or vulnerable child (OVC), elderly poor who are 65 years and above, persons with extreme disability unable to work, and extremely poor pregnant women and children below the age of two years, under the LEAP 1000 programme. This resulted in the programme actually getting to its intended target groups. The interviewee provided statistics of the categories of beneficiaries of the LEAP programme in the district. Fifty per cent of the beneficiaries comprised people who were 65 years or older, 29% were care givers of orphans and vulnerable children, 19% were people with severe disabilities unable to work, while 2% were poor pregnant women and infants below the age of two. This is an indication of proper targeting. It means the programme is reaching its intended target beneficiaries in Karaga district, as all the beneficiaries fall under the subcategories defined by MoGCSP. Generally, therefore, there is a high level of conformity to the target groups defined by the theory of justice for fairness and social protectionism. The District Director of Social Development stated that the selection of beneficiary households is done through a household survey, using questionnaires. This is done by social welfare officials with the assistance of community LEAP focal persons.

Effects of LEAP grants on poverty reduction

Contribution of LEAP grants to rural poverty reduction

The significance of cash transfer to individuals and households cannot be understated in poverty reduction efforts. In an FGD at Gumah, beneficiaries stated that they use the LEAP grant to buy food, clothing, health services, child education, and farm inputs to satisfy family needs. These findings conform to those of Miller et al. (2010), that the cash allowed them to gain access to goods and materials, including food, healthcare, school supplies, clothing, blankets, housing, and live-stock. They also spend part of the money on cultural issues such as child naming, funeral, and marriage rites. Their responses on how the LEAP grant has contributed to poverty reduction in their respective communities are below.

Contribution to reducing hunger and food insecurity in rural areas

FGDs among LEAP beneficiaries revealed that a great number use the grants to buy food to feed their families. A widow in Gumah remarked:

Before LEAP grants, my family sometimes went a whole day without food due to lack of money; my children lost weight and grew stunted because they did not have enough to eat. However, when I was finally registered on to the LEAP programme and the monies started coming, now 'Alhamdulillah' [thank God] this is no longer the case. I use majority of the money to buy food to feed my family. We eat three to four times a day and still have reserved food.

This finding conforms to Handa et al. (2016) findings that among very poor households, impacts on total consumption are about equal to the per capita value of the transfer, which is expected to lead to reductions in consumption-based poverty measures. This finding is further buttressed by other beneficiaries. A physically challenged person in Tong stated that:

The money is used to buy food. Now my children are happy to go to school unlike before. They have money for food at school and there is also food for them at home after school. Anytime I receive the money I use half for food and keep half for emergencies.

A blind beneficiary in Tong said:

Because of the social discrimination against people with disabilities, nobody in my family fed me, hence, I engaged in begging with the aid of my brother's son to earn a living for myself. Now because of the LEAP grants I can now buy my own food and eat three times a day instead of once a day before LEAP. I am no longer a beggar. I assist my family in providing food and prevent our children from going to school hungry.

A female caregiver reported that:

It has helped me a lot and I feel ok because I use that money to buy nutritious food for my children. I no longer use my own little money. Now my children don't cry or worry me of hunger anymore.

These reports conform to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection's findings that LEAP has impacted on beneficiaries and families in areas such as food security and increased consumption (MoGCSP 2016). This implies that the policy is contributing to meeting Sustainable Development Goal 2, which aims at achieving zero hunger. Handa et al. (2014) found that there was no impact of LEAP on overall food and non-food expenditure. While this was the case, the food security situation of LEAP households was found to have improved dramatically. They also found LEAP to have increased savings by 11 percentage points.

Contribution to rural health

FGDs also revealed that LEAP beneficiaries are enrolled automatically into the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) and have their fees waived. A widow in Kunang stated:

LEAP helps me in taking care of the health of my children after the death of my husband. I am able to buy drugs for them when they are sick. I am also able to renew our NHIS cards when they expired, unlike previously ... now LEAP renews them free of charge to enable me take them to Sung Community-based Health Planning and Services compound to seek medical care when sick.

A 70-year-old physically challenged person in Tong stated:

Now when any of my children are sick or injured, I quickly take them to a health care facility with the aid of the free health insurance indigent card. This was not the case in the past where I took them to herbal centre for treatment because I couldn't afford the cost of treatment at the health centre.

These findings confirm to Owusu-Addo's (2016) finding that cash transfers improved child nutrition, health service utilisation, poverty reduction and social transformation, education, and emotional health and well-being.

Contribution to educational enrolment and retention of children of the rural poor

The education component of the programme which conditioned households to send their children to school was embraced by participants as central to breaking the intergenerational poverty cycle. In line with this, a female caregiver at Nyingali said: *"The money helps me to take care of the children's education. I am able to afford their uniforms, books and other school stuffs. Once they are educated they can get better jobs to do when they grow"*.

In all the communities, it was said that even though children were not charged for school fees, there were parent-teacher association (PTA) and other levies. Parents or guardians also meet the costs of school uniforms, bags, shoes, exercise books and printing of examination question papers, which made it difficult for the poor to send their children to school. LEAP has therefore made an impact on children's schooling. Handa et al. (2014) also found that LEAP has increased access to schooling at the secondary level, and at all levels has improved the quality of access, with fewer days missed and less grade repetition.

Contribution to rural agricultural production

Another major contribution of LEAP grants according to the FGDs was that beneficiaries use part of their grants to farm. A male aged beneficiary in Tamaligu said:

Before the grants, I had just half a hectare of land cultivated through household labour, and we harvested 2–3 bags of maize. However, when I started receiving the grants, I am now able to pay for tractor services of five hectares of land, buy seeds, weedicides and pay for farm labour. With this, I expanded the land size and was able to harvest 25 bags of maize last year. I sold 10 bags, fed my family with six bags and will sell the rest to further expand my farm this year.

A widow beneficiary in Bagurugu said:

After the death of my husband, I had no money to start farming that year. The assemblyman seeing my plight helped enrolled me onto LEAP and when the money came, I started farming with one hectare of land and expanded it to three hectares last year and hope to further expand it this year. I am now able to feed my children and send them to school.

Another widow in Zankali stated:

Before the LEAP money, my son used his friend's bullock to make a hectare of farm land and we harvested two and half bags of maize which was not enough to feed the family. There was hunger in the family during dry seasons, which compelled him to go to Accra to be a 'scrubs dealer' to sustain the family... since the LEAP money started coming, we have expanded our farm to four hectares of maize and two hectares of groundnut. We harvested 20 bags of maize and 11 bags of groundnut last year. Now there is no more hunger and poverty in the family and we no longer depend on his father's relatives who maltreated us in the past.

This corroborates Miller, Tsoka, and Reichart's (2011) findings that the Malawi cash transfer programme had noticeable impacts on the ownership of both agricultural and non-agricultural assets.

Contribution to savings and investments in animal rearing among the rural poor

Some caregivers mentioned that they could now save the money accrued from the sale of their farm produce. A female caregiver in Zankali noted:

I spend the LEAP money on the children and save part in rearing goats so that I can pay their school fees in the future. The programme has also helped me save the income that I earn from my farm to meet future needs.

A 78-year-old male LEAP beneficiary in Nyong-Nayili stated:

They educated us to save part of the money for investment, so I saved and invested in the rearing of poultry, sheep and goats. Hitherto, there was none in this house, so the grant has helped my savings and investment.

A 47-year-old physically challenged person in Nyong-Nayili also noted that:

I used savings from the grants to start a table top sale of provisions. Later when it expanded, I built this store and have now become a sole proprietor in this village. Through this, I invested in poultry, goats, sheep and even bought a cow last year.

This finding is consistent with Handa and Park (2012) observation that LEAP has increased investment, trading and created employment for some beneficiaries.

Contribution to social inclusion of the excluded in rural areas

FGDs with beneficiaries revealed that the programme is also strengthening social networks among the rural poor. A female beneficiary in Langogu noted: *"In this village, it is now difficult to tag orphans and vulnerable children as being poor as they wore good clothes and shoes making them more equal to their peers"*.

A 44-year-old physically challenged person in Sung noted that:

Before the LEAP grants, the disabled in this community were not invited to social events on grounds that we were poor. With the LEAP money, now we are invited to naming ceremonies, funerals, weddings and are able to contribute to community development projects. Now we feel being part of our society and happier than before.

This conforms to the findings of Handa et al. (2016b) that cash transfers have wide-ranging effects on ultra-poor households and built comprehensive systems of social entitlements that have substantially reduced poverty and inequality.

Apart from the evidence of poverty reduction, the findings are also consistent with the economic emancipation argument of the theory of justice as fairness and social protectionism, as LEAP provides financial capital, which is also used to purchase physical capital for various forms of economic activities for further income-generating activities. However, these findings would be more meaningful with a comparison of LEAP and non-LEAP beneficiary conditions, such as changes in income, to show the extent of subjugation or alleviation from income poverty.

Comparative analysis of income levels between LEAP beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries

This section addresses the null and alternate hypotheses of this study, that access to LEAP cash transfer does not predict change in beneficiary income, or that access to LEAP cash transfer does predict change in beneficiary income. Tables 2 and 3 present the results.

The results in Table 2 show a B coefficient value of 2.813094 for income, significant at 0.005. This means a unit change in income as a result of LEAP grants leads to an increase in income by 2.8 units. As income increases poverty reduces, since households could afford the basic needs of health, education, food, and productivity among others. The qualitative data presented earlier also demonstrates this. Table 3 shows results for people with similar characteristics as the LEAP beneficiaries who were qualified to benefit from the programme but were not involved, and their incomes were also used to run a linear regression analysis.

The results in Table 3 show a B coefficient of 0.1150264 for income, with a *P* value of 0.181, which is greater than the significant value of 0.05, and so there is no significant relationship between LEAP grant and incomes of non-beneficiaries of LEAP. It means a unit change in income without LEAP grants, but at the time LEAP was implemented in the district, leads to a lower increase in current income by 0.12 units for non-beneficiaries. This means that poverty levels will not change significantly to enable them to improve upon their basic needs of life. The results show that the alternate hypothesis, that access to LEAP cash grant predicts change in income cannot, therefore, be rejected for LEAP beneficiaries.

Factors that impede the successful implementation of LEAP in Karaga district

The District LEAP Programme Officer revealed that there were political influences in the running of the programme. He complained that politicians attempt to influence the selection of communities to favour their political interests. This results in poor targeting of beneficiaries. He added that such interferences were sometimes accompanied by threats of withdrawal from the post if the Programme Officer failed to meet their interests.

The District Director of Social Developments also pointed out that the programme does not promote engagement between policymakers and recipients in programme design. Accordingly,

Table 2. Relationship between LEAP and incomes of beneficiaries.

Model	Coefficients					
	<i>B</i>	Std. Err	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i> > <i>t</i>	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Constant	181.2872	0.4135395	6.80	0.200	1.992114	3.634074
Income	2.813094	63.44583	2.86	0.005	55.33126	307.2431

Source: Field data (2017).

Table 3. Relationship between LEAP and incomes of non-beneficiaries.

Model	Coefficients					
	<i>B</i>	Std. Err	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i> > <i>t</i>	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Constant	225.8845	27.10822	8.33	0.000	172.0679	279.7012
Income	0.1150264	0.852823	1.35	0.181	-0.0542803	0.2843332

Source: Field data (2017).

beneficiaries do not know their rights and cannot make recommendations to improve the programme based on their experiences. Cases of poor motivation of LEAP officials and lack of logistics were also reported.

Conclusion

The LEAP programme entails cash grants paid every two months to registered vulnerable household members in selected communities, such as the aged, orphaned children, and disabled people unable to work. The findings indicated that LEAP to a greater extent is improving on the lives of the poor in rural communities. It has contributed positively to poverty reduction through the reduction of hunger, improved access to health care, child education, investment in agriculture and other income-generating activities, and the promotion of inclusion of previously marginalised persons in cultural events.

The programme is also contributing to the social protectionist policy of Ghana and meeting aspects of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, a majority of the poor in the catchment areas are still not covered. This results in differences among the vulnerable groups in terms of income and access to other basic needs of life.

Recommendations

The key policy recommendations arising from the findings are that there should be de-politicisation in the selection of LEAP beneficiaries to ensure accurate targeting. Poverty reduction is seen as a national agenda and therefore programme and projects aimed at poverty reduction should be devoid of politics so that such programmes can benefit the poor.

The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection can liaise with the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Services to exempt children benefiting from LEAP from paying extra expenses such as examination and PTA fees in order not to worsen the plight of these vulnerable children and encourage school attendance and retention. Some of these children may drop out of school as a result of these fees.

Since the majority of the beneficiaries are engaged in agriculture, there should be a subsidy system for agriculture inputs to enable them to engage in agriculture to promote longer term poverty alleviation. They can be enrolled on the government programme for planting for food and providing jobs.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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