BENEFICIARIES EXPERIENCES WITH SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES FOR POVERTY REDUCTION IN GHANA
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The Ghanaian economy has been relatively stable since 2010. The economic growth potentials have been strengthened by the commercial production of oil and gas. These led to the country achieving a lower middle-income status. For several years, governments have implemented social protection programmes to cover all bases, for the extreme poor.

It is expected that the changes in economic trajectory and implementation of several forms social protection programmes will contribute to poverty reduction and improve inclusivity. However, a quarter of Ghana’s population continue to live in abject poverty. A sample of one hundred and twenty-one (121) beneficiaries from three (3) abjectly poor districts namely Sissala West, Kintampo South and Shai Osudoku District were studied to understand the effects of social protection programmes on poverty reduction.

The report concludes that poverty reduction and social inclusion were achieved by beneficiaries that were able to identify opportunities in their localized markets and leverage them to support their sustenance. Thus, it has become increasingly clear from the study that the surest way to contribute to poverty reduction and improve inclusivity is to promote local market opportunities, improve market access and incentivize innovation in poor communities in Ghana.
The positive gains registered by the economy of Ghana are yet to influence positive outcomes of social protection programmes, and ultimately improve the chances of the poor in securing sustainable livelihoods. While social protection programmes have been touted as one of the surest ways to ending extreme poverty, enthusiasts of market-led economies have argued otherwise. It is thus imperative to understand the role of social protection programmes such as the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty, in minimizing extreme poverty.

IMANI Centre for Policy and Education with the support of ATLAS Network convened a multi-stakeholder engagement on the January 30, 2020 at the Swiss Spirits Hotel in Accra. The event premiered a video documentary on the poverty alleviation strategies of the Ghanaian government, with a focus on the flagship Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme and the launching of a field report on same. The workshop was attended by diverse stakeholders including; representatives from Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, District Chief Executives of some local government authorities – collaborators for implementation of the programme, the World Bank, Plan Ghana, Media, Civil Society Organization, security services and other stakeholders.

A cross-section of audience from different stakeholder groups
Objectives of the Workshop

The workshop among other things sought to;

1. Launch a report on beneficiaries' experiences with social protection programmes in Ghana.
2. Project the plights of poor people and advocate for improvement in poverty reduction strategies through photojournalism.
3. Premier a video documentary that presents the life of poor people and their experiences with Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty.
4. Promote dialogue with relevant stakeholders in the area of social protection and poverty reduction.

Highlights of Key Activities

The workshop commenced with an art exhibition by artists. Artists presented their pieces and told stories of poverty and social exclusion from different parts of Ghana. Participants had the opportunity to explore the art works and understand the various dimensions of inequality and the seeming neglect of the phenomenon of social protection. The photo exhibition created a conducive atmosphere to discuss issues about poverty.

The photo exhibition was followed by a presentation of snapshots of the report from the study. The presentation focused on social protection programmes implemented in Ghana and the experiences of beneficiaries. The presentation pointed out the major issues with regard to beneficiaries' experiences with the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme. Stakeholders also contributed to discussions on the issues raised in the report.

The video documentary was premiered and will serve as the tool of advocating for changes to the design of social protection programmes. The programme was moderated by Imani’s head of research Patrick Kwabena Stephenson.
Art Exhibition

Highlights of the Presentation

The presentation centred on the role of the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty programme in poverty reduction from the perspective of beneficiaries. The presentation showed that the lives of beneficiaries were characterized by low income, malnutrition, aged neglect and child poverty. The presentation also discussed the utilization of the LEAP cash. The report found that the primary use of the cash was to support education of children, feeding and accommodation. It further revealed that the beneficiaries sought to smoothen their consumption, by primarily exploring market based solutions in investments. These opportunities guaranteed consistency and predictability of household income. The presentation also touched on the challenges beneficiaries face when accessing the grant such as cost of travel to receive the cash affect the net grant to the beneficiary. Management-side challenges such as targeting beneficiaries, lack of proper monitoring and evaluation and effective case management activities were discussed. The presentation recommended that the programme must support beneficiaries to leverage on the local economy, effectively integrate the LEAP programme with other social services and adopt a multi-stakeholder approach to communicate the exit strategy.
Presentation by Patrick Kwabena Stephenson, Head of Research - Imani Centre for Policy and Education

Presentation by Dennis Asare, Internal Consultant - Imani Centre for Policy and Education
Key Issues during the Discussions

Representatives from government had the opportunity to share their experiences on the subject, the report and the documentary. The District Chief Executive of the Sissala West District in sharing his experience emphasized the relevance of the report because it reveals issues about the programme that will be ignored by government. The evidence of the impact of the programme in minimizing poverty in the Sissala West district is glaring. However, the long-term effect may be jeopardized if effect measures are not put in place to ensure that beneficiaries are supported to leverage on local market and economic opportunities.

He explained that;

“I was involved in this study and I can say it is very important at this time of the programme. I can say that many people in my district currently have farms, small businesses and access to schools and health services have been improved. However, I am of the view that proper measures need to be put in place to strengthen the programme. For example, there are some communities that are very deprived in the district that are not on the programme. In addition, the programme must consider providing a system where beneficiaries need not to travel to receive the funds. In my district, I know some two communities that travel to receive their cash. I will urge the Ministry to consider the recommendations by Imani”

- Hon. Bakor Zakaria Mohammed, DCE-Sissala West
The Social Protection Specialist of the World Bank country Office in Ghana, Ms. Christabel Ewuradjoa Dadzie also contributed to the discussions by asking the reason for selecting the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty as the case study. The team responded in the affirmative that there are other social protection programmes in the country, however, the most consistent programme implemented across the country is the LEAP programme. Thus, it served as benchmark for assessing the effect of such programmes in minimizing extreme poverty.

Ms. Christabel also responded to issues about beneficiaries travelling long distances for their cash. In her response she noted that the challenges in payment presented in the report are partly due to the limited infrastructure of banking service across the country. Beneficiaries in the towns and cities may not have this challenge because they have access to several financial institutions. She further added that:

“I always hear people suggest adopting a mobile money platform. This was part of the plans but the cost of payment through the ezwich card was three times less than the mobile services. We need a system that could allow the beneficiaries receive all their cash and not suffer any withdrawal charges.”

Dr. Rita Owusu-Amankwah, the Director of Social Protection at the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection contributed to the discussions by responding to some of the issues raised in the report. Dr. Owusu Amankwah begun by acknowledging the level of detail of the report and implored more CSO’s to support with such enriching knowledge. She started by responding to the issue of targeting. She explained;

“Selection of non-eligible beneficiaries is one major challenge that has been with the programme since its inception. To resolve this problem, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection has implemented the national household registry that provides information about every family or individual. This is expected to automatically enrol extremely poor persons unto the programme. Furthermore, a computerized program for selection has been developed to ensure efficient transfer of poor families.” - Dr. Rita Owusu-Amankwah.

Presentation by Dr. Rita Owusu-Amankwah, Director of Social Protection, MOG CSP

She further added that the issue of payment has been resolved in most of the regions in Ghana. The distance between beneficiaries and payment centres have been reduced to 5km. However, she noted that the communities traveling to receive their cash in our report has been noted and will be resolved.
Dr. Rita Owusu-Amankwah agreed with the conclusion of the report that jumping out of poverty does not require only cash transfer but supporting beneficiaries to leverage on their local market opportunities.

“I agree that it will take more than just a cash transfer for the beneficiaries to jump out of poverty. We are currently working with the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Roads and other government agencies to provide support to beneficiaries. Currently, we are working with the Ministry of Agriculture to include LEAP beneficiaries in the ‘Planting for Food and Jobs programme’.”- Dr. Rita Owusu-Amankwah

She further added;

We have developed a computerized program that will facilitate monitoring the development of beneficiaries. This computerized program would help us track the impact of the programme nation-wide. It also gives us the opportunity to leverage on the monitoring and evaluation tools to prepare people to exit the programme. Additionally, we have also developed a toll-free number to allow beneficiaries seek for help. We hear cases of parents paying school fees and books as seen in the documentary by IMANI. These facilities are free. The toll-free number is expected to allow beneficiaries get access to the Ministry.”- Dr. Rita Owusu-Amankwah

She also commented in the exit plan of the programme. Dr. Rita explained that;

“A lot of work has gone into developing a good strategy to exit beneficiaries from the programme. As you have demonstrated, we need a strategy that will not lead to the beneficiaries retrogressing after exiting the LEAP programme. The Ministry has plans to provide US$200 support to beneficiaries that will exit the programme in addition to other forms of support.”- Dr. Rita Owusu-Amankwah

From the above discussions, it is clear that stakeholders are of the view that providing support for poor families to participate in the localized market opportunities is the unwavering means of minimizing poverty.
Summary of Action Points

The team needs to consider the impact of other business oriented social interventions on the beneficiaries, the market issues and how it can be modelled to suit the LEAP programme.

Closing Remarks

“I think this has been an enlightening and fruitful conversation. This work could have been completed last year if the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and the LEAP Secretariat collaborated with us. Imani is interested in improving social protection programmes for the better.

Our objective exercise was proving that improving access to market opportunities will be efficient means for to jump out of poverty and I think this has been well demonstrated through the documentary.”

Mr. Franklin Cudjoe, President and CEO, IMANI Centre for Policy and Education
Video Link