

Of Safety Ropes, Nets, Ladders and Trampolines: Exploring the Politics of Implementation of the Livelihoods Empowerment against Poverty in the Central Region of Ghana

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Abstract— Social protection has been an important component of the development discourse in particularly underdeveloped countries in the light of failure of past policies in reducing poverty and building human capabilities. It is expected to manage risk and adversity among poor and vulnerable groups. Yet the conception, selection of recipients and disbursement of support systems have sometimes been compromised for political gains. Being an area which has received little research the key role of politics in shaping this all important social protection agenda has generally been overlooked. This study explores the role of politics in shaping Ghana's Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty, a flagship social protection intervention, in the Central Region. It used the programme implementers in the region as respondents as well as some members of a beneficiary community. The study identified that international donor agencies and countries that support LEAP have influenced the size of the programme whereas local political actors have tried and failed to capture its benefits in a number of ways.

Index Terms— Poverty, Livelihoods, Social Protection, Development, Politics.

I. INTRODUCTION

There is a plethora of literature on social protection policies and programmes designed by governments and agencies to alleviate the suffering of the poor particularly in developing societies. The concept has therefore become an integral part of the development discourse, gaining prominence in development policy and practice in response to the failure of past policies to reduce poverty and enhance human capabilities in a rapidly changing global context (Cook & Kabee 2009). It is expected that social protection will help people manage risk and adversity and contribute to economic growth and poverty reduction. Social protection has also been linked to by strengthening governance systems, enhancing state stability and legitimacy and increased citizenship with the potential also to positively affect democratization and nation building processes (Rohregger, 2010; Hickey, 2007).

In spite of the great contributions of social protection policies, programmes and projects in lifting the poor out of their vulnerability and poverty, it is also the case that the conception, selection of recipients and disbursement of support systems have sometimes been compromised for political gains. Being an area which has received little

research the key role of politics in shaping this all important social protection agenda has generally been overlooked. Hickey (2007) has observed that politics plays a more central role in shaping social protection initiatives than has hitherto been recognized. Who deserves support and in what form, the decision to expand the number of recipients or to redirect expenditure towards some vulnerable and poor groups are all political. Literature from South Africa, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana deal with the politicization of social protection strategies in an effort to understand and appreciate the how and why of social protection implementation in those countries. (Lavers & Hickey, 2015; Hickey, 2007).

This paper does not attempt an overview of the field of social protection in Ghana nor does it investigate the achievements and challenges of the strategies implemented under the country's social protection policy. These grounds have been ably covered by a number of researches (see Diadone, Handa, Davis, Park, Osei-Osei-Akoto, 2015; Agyeman, Antwi&Abane 2014; Roelen&Chettri, 2014; ILO, 2014; Oxford Policy Management (OPM), 2013; Abebrese, 2011) and several policy briefs emanating from some commissioned studies in the country. What this paper does is to attempt to travel in seemingly uncharted waters to explore the politics behind the country's Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme, initiated in 1987 and implemented in 1988.

The literature identifies two main aspects of the politics of social protection, the global or international and the national. This paper will attempt to uncover the national aspects of politics involved in the implementation of the LEAP social policy if any. It explored issues of the politics of patronage, elite capture, party political interests in the selection of communities, targeting of beneficiaries and general implementation of LEAP. The extent to which the implementation of the LEAP is linked to electoral fortunes of the implementing government is explored.

II. CONCEPT AND ARGUMENTS FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION

Early connotations of the concept of social protection emerged in the 1990 World Development Report which called for state support for poor people and positioned "safety nets" as one of the three components of a global poverty reduction strategy (Hashemi&Umaira, 2011). Safety nets are perceived as short term emergency measures put in place to

Of safety Ropes, Nets, Ladders and Trampolines: Exploring the Politics of Implementation of the Livelihoods Empowerment against Poverty in the Central Region of Ghana

prevent individuals from falling below a given standard of living (Shepherd, Marcus & Barrientos, 2004) or lift those who have fallen to such a level up to a minimum acceptable standard of living (safety ropes) (Conway and Norton, 2002).

Social protection has been defined by different authors and development agencies variously but the issues addressed are similar. Norton, Conway and Foster (2001) define it as the public actions taken in response to levels of vulnerability, risk and deprivation which are deemed socially unacceptable within a given polity or society. Marcus and Wilkinson (2002) define it as public policy concerned with the livelihoods and welfare of particularly poor and vulnerable groups – those who have been bypassed or who have lost out in other economic and social policy, and those who, for various reasons, are particularly vulnerable to the effects of poverty. The OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) describes it as those public actions that enhance the capacity for poor people to participate in, contribute to and benefit from economic, social and political life of their communities and societies. (OECD, 2007). On the other hand, DFID (2005) perceives social protection to encompass a sub-set of public actions, carried out by the state or privately, that address risk, vulnerability and chronic poverty. Shepherd, Marcus and Barrientos (2004) also define social protection to include all interventions from public, private and voluntary organizations and informal networks to support communities, households and individuals in their efforts to prevent, manage and overcome risks and vulnerabilities. Whereas the first three definitions are narrow in the sense that they limit social protection to only public policy and action, the definitions by DFID and Shepherd et al are broader and capture all interventions made by all actors including the public actors. The recipients of social protection therefore are the vulnerable in society whose livelihoods are poor and or risky and who must be supported to smooth over such vulnerabilities in an attempt to ensure a minimum acceptable livelihood. What is minimum and acceptable livelihood will be dictated by individual countries and polities. However, the United Nations has set out some benchmarks for the global community to achieve this in its Millennium Development Goals.

Two issues become clear from the issues involving social perception. First, it could be a conceptual approach that offers a way of thinking about what individuals and groups need to live comfortably, what role the state could play to facilitate such comfort, and also an approach to identify the vulnerabilities of particular individuals and groups. Second, social protection could be viewed as a set of policies made up of interventions that address social and economic vulnerabilities of individuals and groups as well as identify factors that hinder such people from enjoying fulfilled lives (Shepherd et. al 2004; Devereaux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004). Social protection as policy thus involves an assessment of risk and vulnerability of a group of individuals; identifying the main hazards to which poor people are most vulnerable as well as which people are vulnerable to which hazard, and what combination of instruments best protect them against the major hazards (Shepherd et. al 2004).

III. LIVELIHOOD VULNERABILITY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The concept of vulnerability is distinguished from that of poverty. Whilst poverty is perceived to be static, vulnerability is dynamic and captures change processes as people move in and out of poverty (Moser, 1998: 3; citing Lipton and Maxwell 1992). The meaning of vulnerability is expanded to include a range of elements and situations of livelihood security as for instance exposure to risk, hazards, shocks and stress, difficulty in coping with contingencies as well as linked to assets (Moser, 1998: 3; citing Longhurst 1994). The livelihoods of majority of the poor are beset with cyclical and acute food insecurity caused by seasonality and famine (Devereux, 2001: 507; Chambers, Longhurst & Pacey, 1981), globalization, structural adjustment and economic reform, regional and international financial crises, environmental degradation and demographic transition (Kabeer, 2002: 589). These make most livelihoods risky and vulnerable, as the poor face greater exposure to livelihood threats and are made more susceptible to shocks and lower asset holdings.

Households and communities particularly in developing countries resort to a number of informal coping mechanisms that involve reductions in expenditure (Devereux, 2001; Morduch and Sharma, 2002; Kabeer, 2002). Such households first fall upon their insurance mechanisms such as savings, then dispose of productive assets at distress prices before embarking upon destitution behaviour such as distress migration (Moser, 1998; Devereux, 2001; Morduch and Sharma, 2002; Kabeer, 2002; Conway and Norton, 2002). The list is expanded to include a cut in consumption, income diversification through home based enterprises and renting out and borrowing from neighbours and money lenders. Others are reducing and or canceling planned investment, pulling school-age children out of school either to save money or to put them in the labour market, substitution of private for public goods and services and increased reliance on extended family support networks.

The concern with livelihood insecurity and the even riskier coping mechanisms that sometimes leave households worst off has generated a discourse on social protection as safety ropes, nets, ladders and trampolines to manage such risks (Devereux, 2001; 2002; Conway and Norton, 2002; Kabeer, 2002; Morduch and Sharma, 2002). It is argued that social protection policies and programmes will help poor households to reduce unnecessary exposures to risk, deal with adverse events when they cannot be avoided and help the poor to develop and maintain their human capital. In addition the policy would help poor households to escape from exploitative social relations that guarantee survival during crises time and also to take calculated investment and production risks that have a net positive effect on growth and poverty reduction (Conway and Norton, 2002: 534).

Social protection policies and programmes are thus redistributive transfers designed to give first, social assistance to reduce the incidence or depth of chronic poverty and second, social insurance to smooth consumption and prevent destitution or mortality after transitory shocks (Devereux, 2001; Conway and Norton, 2002). By so doing social protection policies provide a number of things namely (a)

promotional measures designed to give relief from poverty and deprivation (Kabeer, 2002; Devereux, 2002); (b) safety nets to prevent the poor from falling into utter destitution; (c) safety ropes that tether the individual in order to minimize the distance fallen when misfortune strikes; (d) ladders to offer opportunities to climb out of poverty; and (e) trampolines that link risk management to prospects for growth and poverty reduction (Devereux, 2001; 2002; Conway and Norton, 2002; Kabeer, 2002; Morduch and Sharma, 2002). The fine lines that differentiate these measures in social policy are sometimes overlooked as they are used interchangeably to represent social protection generally.

IV. THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION IN AFRICA

Social protection programmes play key roles in redistributing wealth in countries that implement them. This makes social protection a governance and therefore a political issue (Lavers & Hickey, 2015; Rohregger, 2010; Hickey, 2007; Devereux, 2002). Cook and Kabeer (2009) in reviewing social protection policies globally, noted that whereas much of the policies have been couched in technical terms, research at the local level indicates that social protection is highly political. DFID in its analyses of the policy context of social transfers also note that any such successful policy ought to be aligned to the political priorities of countries concerned in particular political leadership and backed by interest groups to initiate, institutionalize and sustain social transfer programmes. Hickey's research in Africa suggests that the purely economic and technocratic slant given to social protection policies should give way to an analysis of the different forms of politics that shape different dimensions of social protection programmes on the continent – conception and implementation, sustenance and identification of beneficiary groups. Research particularly indicates that politics, political regimes and political interests play an important role in shaping the distribution, content and the boundaries of social protection (Cook & Kabeer, 2009). These programmes are used to please clientelistic interests, influence the level of political support and retain regime legitimacy (Hickey, 2007).

On the other hand, research has also indicated that social protection can also transform politics and potentially build social cohesion (Hickey, 2011) and social contracts (Rohregger, 2010). Rohregger (2010) argues that as a governance issue, social protection policy strengthens governance systems, enhances democracy and promotes nation building processes through political consensus, effective administrative structures and socio-economic growth.

Empirical studies from Zambia (Kuss, 2015; Devereux & White, 2007) and Botswana (Botlhale, Mogopodi, Mofosi & Motshagwa 2015), have also examined the political economy of the social protection programmes in place in the two countries. Kuss examines the demand and supply of social protection programmes in Zambia before and after the regime change in 2011 and observes the operation of informal and rights-based formal rules before and after the regime change respectively. Patrimonialism and clientelism were used before

the regime change among rural constituents to improve the electoral fortunes of the MMD prior to the regime change in 2011. The PF, after the regime change, changed the rules governing social protection and is focused more on formalizing the programmes – formal targeting, strong oversight by donors and scaling up cash transfers. In spite of these efforts, the researcher concludes that because demand for social protection does not come from the voiceless poor and vulnerable but supplied by government anyway, the implementation may be beset with political pressures in the long run. Kuss' assertion on the MMD's use of politics in the distribution of resources is buttressed by Devereux and White (2007) when they note that in the 2006 elections, the MMD party successfully countered the urban appeal of the PF by buying support from rural voters with pledges to increase the already substantial subsidy on fertilizer to sixty percent. Thus the ruling MMD was accused of targeting food aid and other social transfers at government-supporting communities and diverting same away from areas that oppose the regime, irrespective of the severity and scale of need in these communities. Botswana's social protection programme is based on a social contract between government and vulnerable groups most affected by poverty, lack of access to social amenities, poor health and poor nutrition. All political parties, while having different interpretations of the causes of poverty and varied strategies for addressing it, believe that the state has an obligation to support her citizens, educate and empower them, as well as create employment opportunities for them. But officials were concerned that the social protection programmes will create a dependency syndrome (Botlhale et al. 2015).

V. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Current problems associated with social protection in Africa are seen as institutional (lack of finance and administrative capacity) because of the lack of clarity concerning the specific ways in which politics shapes social protection, or what forms of political analysis are required to understand these relationships (Hickey, 2007). A systematic understanding of how politics shapes social protection policies in Africa would have to address issues such as the political pressures or incentives that push governments to redirect expenditure towards vulnerable and poor groups, the conditions under which political elites might support social protection initiatives, the importance of elections, multiparty politics and decentralized governance, as well as the roles donors play as political actors in shaping policy decisions in poor countries (Hickey, 2007). A causal link is found between social protection and politics. This link is both multidimensional and multidirectional. Whereas different forms of politics shape different dimensions of social protection programmes (size, type, implementation and sustainability), social protection itself has political impacts that range from increased levels of social solidarity and political stability to maintenance of the status quo. In addition, social protection itself shapes the politics of social protection in the sense that its success might influence the level of political support (Hickey, 2007).

Hickey (2007:2) identifies four key aspects of politics in

Of safety Ropes, Nets, Ladders and Trampolines: Exploring the Politics of Implementation of the Livelihoods Empowerment against Poverty in the Central Region of Ghana

Africa that are important in shaping social protection on the continent. These are political institutions, political actors and agencies, socioeconomic forces and the global dimension. Sourcing North, 1990, he identifies institutional features to constitute the historically embedded rules of the game within a given society. Thus political institutions are both formal (elections, political parties and policy legacies) and informal (patron-client relations). The political actors are those individuals and agencies that operationalize and contest the rules of the game in ways that shape the distribution of public goods and power. These actors draw on their ideologies and capacities to set the agenda for social protection and include political parties, political elites and government departments and agencies. Socioeconomic forces at work in social protection include public attitudes, levels of citizen's voice, levels of urbanization, levels and forms of social fragmentation and economic inequality. These socioeconomic forces are not intrinsically political yet they often gain a high degree of political salience through their influence of public policy. Last but not least is global actors and discourses that have become influential as a result of the particular characteristics of governance in most African countries.

A. Institutional features

Hickey identifies and focuses on the role of elections and political party systems as well as the informal world of patron-client politics. He identifies studies in Kenya, Uganda, and Botswana in which political welfare transfers have been made during election years to secure the elections. Such welfare transfers do not necessarily target the most needy in society but rather target constituencies that are critical for the regime's political survival. The influence of elections in social protection in Africa is however mediated by the ability of political parties to manage information costs and credibility problems that act as barriers to the expansion of social programmes to the poor. In addition specific social protection policies need to be seen within the context of norms of political rule, norms of governing the management and distribution of public resources, and the politics of representation. In this direction, there is general agreement that neopatrimonialism is the basis upon which political power, legitimacy and accountability have been forged in post-colonial Africa and as such patron-client politics can shape the design and targeting of social protection during the planning and implementation stages. Here, the tendency to distribute public resources according to private interests, extend coverage of programmes to areas favoured by associated patrons is high. Once the resources are at the local level, implementing agencies may also divert them towards particular interest groups rather than the poorest.

B. Political actors and agencies and their discourses

Hickey identifies the key political actors and agencies in Africa's social protection programmes to be the political elites who set the terms of political and policy debates, and the administrative and bureaucratic agencies that either lobby for and/or implement the social protection initiatives. Political elites determine the establishment, targeting and size of social protection programmes based on whether

beneficiaries could be regarded as economic or social citizens. In this direction, economically active poor benefit from state support leaving out the chronic poor.

Social protection generates heated debates among political elites. These debates centre around programme adequacy, discrimination and dependency of beneficiaries. In spite of evidence to the effect that social transfers have been put to productive uses, they have been criticized as being put to wasteful expenditures.

It is argued that social protection succeeds when countries have high levels of institutional capacity and bureaucratic integrity. As has been argued elsewhere in this paper, the mere presence of financial and administrative capacity does not determine the success of social protection in Africa. Hickey suggests that the fact that organizational culture, political commitment and political capacity of bureaucratic actors within government advocate for, and implement social protection initiative, is more important.

Socioeconomic influences include the influence of public attitudes, social fragmentation and inequality, and urbanization on the implementation of social protection in Africa.

Public attitude towards social protection is very important. The public will accept social protection if they believe that beneficiaries are not to be blamed for their poverty; if they accept the manner in which implementation is made in terms of whether it is targeted at specific groups or operates under the principle of universality; and if the goods to be distributed are valuable such as education, health, water, electricity, jobs and support for agriculture. Furthermore, the public buy-in to the programme also depends on trust that the administrative system will work fairly and effectively and deliver the goods in an impartial manner. Any social protection programme that is associated with elite capture and clientelistic patterns of distribution tends to lose support from the public. Here, the negative interference associated with patronage based allocation of resources and the distortion of targeting procedures are seen by the public technically not objective, not based on needs and not politically neutral (Devereaux & White, 2007). Levels of inequality and fragmentation will either reduce or increase the scope of social protection. In Latin America, wide gaps (vertical) in income, employment and residence have reduced the support for social protection whereas in Africa such gaps (both vertical and horizontal) have been the driving force for the programmes as exemplified in countries such as Botswana and South Africa. A final socioeconomic force that tends to shape the social protection programmes in Africa is the level of urbanization. Urbanisation has a positive effect on welfare transfers in poor countries because the urban people are considered politically valuable by governments.

The various strands of the discussion on politics of social protection and their linkages are presented in a framework in figure 1 below. This framework is adapted from that given by Hickey (2007)

VI. THE STUDY REGION

The Central Region is one of the ten administrative regions of the country occupying an area of 9826 km² or 4.1% of the

total land mass of Ghana (Government of Ghana, 2013). It is bordered to the north by Ashanti and Eastern Regions, to the west by the Western Region, to the east by the Greater Accra Region and to the south by the Atlantic ocean. In 2010, it was estimated that the region had a population of some 2,201,863 and a population density of some 162 persons per km². Although the region has a high migrant population from other regions, it is predominantly Akan speaking (90%). About 6.5% of the labour force is employed in the public or government sector with the remaining 83.5% employed in the private informal predominantly as farmers and traders.

The Central region has a total of twenty districts, consisting of one metropolis (further divided into two sub-districts), six municipalities and 13 districts. A UNICEF report based on the 6th Ghana Living Standards Survey has indicated that the region is one of four regions whose poverty depth has risen since 2006; the implication being that not enough has been made to improve the lives of the residents (Cooke, Hague & McKay, 2016). The report indicates that whereas in 2006 the poor comprised 6.4% of the population in the region by 2013, this figure had risen to 6.9%. The poverty headcount and inequality estimates for the region show that these are above the regional estimates for the country as a whole (Government of Ghana, 2015b).

VII. METHODOLOGY

This study has used a qualitative methodology in both design and analysis. It has employed greatly secondary sources of information as well as primary sources. Although the study purposefully included all officers of the implementing agencies of LEAP in the eighteen out of twenty districts in the Central Region as respondents in an interview, 14 made themselves available for interview. In addition, some 15 members of a beneficiary community were interviewed. Here, members who were aware of the LEAP programme and who were willing to be interviewed were interviewed. Implementing officers of the Department of Social Welfare were interviewed on implementation issues such as selection of beneficiary communities and individuals, payment issues, weaning of beneficiaries, complaints and how they are handled as well as monitoring and evaluation of the programme. In the discussions and interactions, issues of elite capture, patron-client relations and many others came to the fore. Community members on the other hand were interviewed on their understanding of the programme and their level of satisfaction with the implementation of the programme. The data generated was analysed qualitatively to unearth any political dimensions of LEAP in line with the conceptual framework within which the study was organized.

In Ghana social protection was introduced in earnest in the aftermath of the economic recovery programmes that spanned a decade from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. Here, a plan of action to mitigate the social costs of adjustment (PAMSCAD) was put in place by the state in response to the harsh economic recovery programmes adopted in the late 1980s. Prior to this era, social protection was dominated by traditional family and community arrangements, interventions by faith-and-welfare-based organizations and emergency relief from government agencies (Anokye,

Abane&Ekumah, 2015; Government interventions had not had adequate impact on the lives of the poor. This finding gave impetus to the need to redesign and coordinate social protection approaches more holistically in order to integrate the concerns of the poor and vulnerable into national development (Government of Ghana, 2015a). A National Social Protection Strategy was thus developed in 2007 and this led to the establishment of a national cash transfer programme (Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty) in 2008. The National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) represents the Government of Ghana's vision of creating an all-inclusive and socially empowered society through the provision of sustainable mechanisms for the protection of persons living in situations of extreme poverty and related vulnerability and exclusion. The NSPS was founded upon the principle that every Ghanaian matters and is capable of contributing his or her quota to national development (Government of Ghana, 2015a). This was a social grant scheme designed to provide a basic and secure income for the most vulnerable households as well as provide better poverty targeting of existing social protection programmes.

In spite of the fact that since the 1990's, poverty levels have steadily declined from 51.7 per cent in 1992 through 28.5 per cent in 2005/6 to 24.3 in 2012/13 and extreme poverty has fallen from 36.5% through 26.8% to 8.4% over the same period (Kumado&Gockel, 2003; Government of Ghana, 2015b), the Ghana Statistical Service has evidence of intensification of vulnerability and exclusion among some groups in the three Northern Savanna regions of the country and the Central Region. The Ghana Statistical Service also notes that children, women and people with disabilities and older persons are disproportionately affected by poverty. Children suffer severe health problems that correlate with low learning capacities and low productivity in adulthood and older persons tend to be informal sector workers who have no access to formal income security protection. There is therefore every reason to suggest that inequality is widening in the country.

The county's social protection policy provides a framework for delivering social protection coherently, effectively and efficiently in a way that is holistic and properly targeted. It is an attempt to bring under one umbrella the increased number of duplicated and fragmented activities, projects and programmes under social protection. Hence its strategic vision is to have an all-inclusive and socially empowered society by providing mechanisms that protect persons living in situations of extreme poverty and related vulnerability and exclusion. It defines social protection as "a range of actions carried out by the state and other parties in response to vulnerability and poverty which seek to guarantee relief for those sectors of the population who for any reason are not able to provide for themselves (Government of Ghana, 2015a: iii).

The policy identifies three categories of vulnerable people to be the chronically poor (eg severely disabled and terminally ill), economically at risk (eg food crop farmers and informal sector workers), and the socially vulnerable (eg female headed households and persons living with HIV/AIDS

Of safety Ropes, Nets, Ladders and Trampolines: Exploring the Politics of Implementation of the Livelihoods Empowerment against Poverty in the Central Region of Ghana

and Tuberculosis). It is envisaged under the policy that in the short term, social protection programmes delivered to the poor and vulnerable will rehabilitate, restore and protect them. Programmes outlined in the policy during this phase include the LEAP, Labour Intensive Public Works (LIPW),

School Feeding Programme (SFP), National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) exemptions and Basic School Capitation Grants. In the medium term, it is expected that programmes delivered will be preventive and promotive while these will be transformational in the long term.

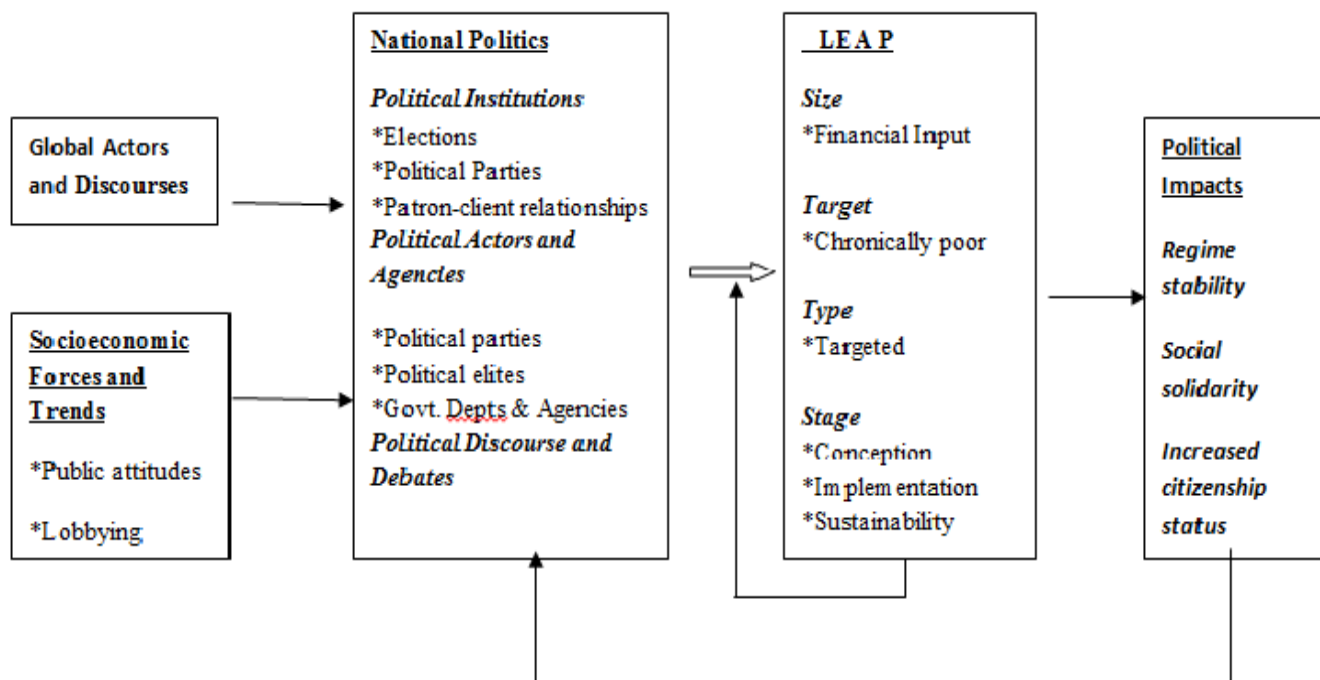


Figure 1: Politics of LEAP – Conceptual Framework Source: Adapted from Hickey (2007): Conceptualising the Politics of Social Protection in Africa - Page 3

VIII GHANA'S LEAP PROGRAMME

LEAP is Ghana's major flagship programme under the country's social protection strategy which started in 2007. It started as a five-year pilot programme between 2008 and 2012, giving financial support to orphan/vulnerable children (OVC), the elderly over 65 years and people with disabilities. Whereas cash transfers to the elderly and severely disabled are unconditional transfers to households with orphans and vulnerable children are conditioned upon sending children to school, registering all births of children, ensuring that children go through all required vaccinations, children visit health facilities every five months, and not allowing children to engage in child labour (ILO, 2014; Agyeman et al, 2014; Abebrese 2011). All beneficiaries have free registration under the NHIS and thus have access to free health care. In addition, beneficiaries are linked to complementary services such as free school uniforms, and are supported to access existing local authority-based poverty reduction initiatives such as the Agricultural Input Support Programme and other micro-finance schemes (Agyeman et al. 2014; Oxford Policy Management, 2013). LEAP is administered by the Ministry of Gender Children and Social Protection and implemented through the LEAP management Unit and District and Community Implementation Committees. The programme is currently piloting the common targeting mechanism and building up a single registry that could be used by other social protection programmes for membership management (ILO, 2014).

IX FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Funding politics of LEAP: Government and Donors

LEAP is funded by the government of Ghana in partnership with international donor agencies and institutions such as the World Bank, UNICEF and DfID. The government is expected to fund 50 percent of LEAP expenditure while the donors fund the other 50 percent. The funding sources for social protection generally from government coffers include the consolidated budget, allocations from statutory funds such as the District Assembly Common Fund (DACF), Ghana Education Trust Fund (GET Fund), National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF), the Road Fund and Social Security contributions (ILO, 2014). In 2012, social protection programmes took 4.8% of total government revenue, one percent of GDP and 12% of the budget for poverty reduction (ILO, 2014). Between 2008 and 2012, LEAP was funded solely through the consolidated budget. The expenditure for LEAP generally has been low. In 2016, it was expected that the budget allocation for LEAP would reduce to 0.09% of government total expenditure and 0.02% of the GDP although the programme expenditure per beneficiary household had increased. The ILO observes that allocations to the statutory funds are volatile, a situation that limits the fund's capacity to act as a financial resource for the social protection programmes. Besides there are no clear rules for the allocation from the statutory funds to social protection programmes and so decisions on fund allocation are political. As observed by the ILO (2014):

*“The flow of funds varies from year to year and the political decisions that drive the allocations are not transparent. As a result, the programme planners never know what to expect and financial planning and management becomes more complicated”
page 116.*

This position is supported by some researchers that there is no economic law that dictates how resources for social protection should be allocated and that political commitment in seeing programmes through is key.

Donor discourses and funding policies have also dictated how social protection programmes in general and LEAP in particular have been funded. The World Bank and DfID are key political players in the country's development policy-making and yet did not fully get involved in the country's efforts at delivering LEAP in the pilot stages due to their belief in rolling back the state and allowing parallel governance structures to offer systematic forms of social protection to citizens. It is only recently that social protection has been significant on the international development agenda. Even here, social protection has been conceptualized as risk management for the economically active, and therefore, becomes less relevant for the destitute and chronically poor in society. Between 2012 and 2016, DfID gave the government of Ghana a total of £36.4 Million. The World Bank also contributed US\$20 Million directly to LEAP with UNICEF through USAID contributing some US\$2.5 Million towards monitoring and evaluation exercises (ILO, 2014).

Donor support has aided the expansion of LEAP to cover more districts and households in the country. Whereas in 2008, LEAP was piloted in 21 districts and covered 1654 beneficiary households (OPM, 2013), from 2012 with donor support, the programme had increased in size to cover 100 districts and benefit 73,301 beneficiary households with 246,115 eligible members (ILO, 2014). It is projected that by the close of 2016, LEAP would cover 165,000 beneficiary households with 50,000 additional households added to it each year until a 635,500 threshold is achieved (ILO, 2014). Over the life span of LEAP, payments to households have therefore increased from a minimum of GHS8.0 and maximum of GHS 15.0 (Abebrese, 2011) depending on the number of needy people in the household to between GHS 24.0 and GHS 45.0 an increase of 300%. Nationwide coverage of LEAP therefore has jumped from 21 districts to 127 out of 216. Within the study region, 18 out of the 20 districts have been covered and a nationwide expansion of the programme in 2015 covered an additional 3970 households in the region.

B. Politics of Selection of Beneficiary Districts, Communities and households

LEAP is operationalized in a manner that ordinarily should not create tensions and acrimony in beneficiary communities. First, a LEAP Management Secretariat, based at the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP) selects districts with deprived communities using geographical targeting based on a poverty or food security map developed

by the Ghana Statistical Service and the National Development Planning Commission. It is expected that the use of poverty maps by a central unit would ensure that only needy districts are selected. This is indeed the case and a good departure from the days when access to roads, availability of electricity, access to potable water and others were used to target beneficiary groups (Abebrese, 2011). However, programme implementers indicated the possibility and indeed the case of lobbying at the highest level (ministerial level) for inclusion of some deprived districts. It was suggested that such lobbying occurs whenever the programme was to be expanded to include new beneficiary communities and households. The remark below illustrates this claim:

*There was this instance we were talking about a possible expansion in the district since we haven't had one since 2010. We were advised to talk to the regional minister. Even there, the LEAP unit keeps to the use of the poverty map. The fact is that if the unit wants to expand to include say hundred communities, the lobbying helps.
(LEAP District Implementing Officer1)*

C. LEAP for votes

Political parties in the country as elsewhere have their support base and they see it very important to ensure that these bases get their fair share of development and social protection schemes. For electioneering purposes, political parties include the delivery of social protection in their manifestos and believe that this will sway some floating votes in their favour. The National Democratic Congress (NDC), the ruling party for instance, has affirmed that under its next government structure (2017-2021) it would roll-out additional social protection initiatives to sustain the livelihood of the vulnerable and lift others out of poverty. The party stated in its 2016 manifesto that its government would continue to consolidate and expand the interventions that have been implemented over the last four years and introduce additional social protection initiatives. In response, the New Patriotic Party, the largest opposition party in the country prior to the 2016 elections, suggests that all the social protection interventions it introduced while in government (2001-2008) have been mismanaged and therefore, when voted into government they were going to put these programmes back on track and even add more. Thus, it appears that LEAP and social protection programmes generally are linked to the electoral fortunes of political parties. This is noted in the observation of some respondents:

It appears LEAP has become a machinery for gathering votes. The incumbent government takes advantage of it and trumpets LEAP's achievement in campaigning. It has a political connotation.

*(District Implementing Officer 2)
The politician is interested in anything that will get him the votes. One political party says we brought the LEAP, the other says we expanded it. Everyone is cashing in on LEAP. (District Implementing officer3)*

Of safety Ropes, Nets, Ladders and Trampolines: Exploring the Politics of Implementation of the Livelihoods Empowerment against Poverty in the Central Region of Ghana

Then,
Policies are evolved by politicians. Onestarts it, another improves upon it. It will be very difficult to take away politics from such social protection programmes. What we need is a genuine attempt by politicians to help the vulnerable and extreme poor. I don't expect them to engage in propaganda for the votes and leave the people dry and out.(District Implementing officer 1)

And,
When we visit beneficiary communities, they tell you this person came here to campaign and promised to expand beneficiaries or increase grant payments. So some go there to do politics with LEAP.(District Implementing Officer 10)

D. Elite Capture

Within districts there is a District Leap Implementation Committee (DLIC). This committee is composed of a minimum of eleven members – The District Chief Executive (DCE) (Political head/administrator of the district), a representative from the Social Services sub-committee of the Assembly, an Assembly man/woman, the District Social Welfare Officer, Director of the Department of Children, the Director of Education, Director of Health, Director of Labour, Director of information and representatives from religious and non-governmental organizations in the district. Respondents claimed that before the use of the poverty maps in identifying and selecting districts and communities within them, the DLIC was mandated to determine areas that are prone to poverty in the districts selected nationally and therefore was responsible for selecting beneficiary communities and sometimes households in their districts. The DCE and other assembly representatives lobbied to include some preferred communities. This was to be expected because decentralization helps to locally control social protection programmes and this is linked with elite capture and spreading. Aspects of elite capture are brought to the fore through claims by respondents as follows:

Prior to the poverty mapping there used to be some interference with the selection. The DCE or MCE will tell you to make sure you register some people in a particular area. They tended to direct our activities. (District Implementing officer2)

DLIC, prior to 2012 was tasked with the selection of beneficiary communities and households. It was realized that there was a lot of politics around their activities. The DCEs could influence the selection so in 2012, the structure was revised by the LEAP Management Secretariat. (District Implementing Officer5)

The current system where targeting of communities is done by central government thus makes the DLIC redundant and non-functional and members no longer meet to select communities that should benefit from LEAP.

At the community level, a Community LEAP Implementation Committee (CLIC) is involved in the initial selection of beneficiaries. This committee is made up of five members including representatives from education (teacher) who also acts as the secretary, health (nurse), and non-governmental organizations. In most of the Districts membership does not strictly follow the list suggested in the LEAP manual. In some districts, traditional leaders and the Assembly representative of the community and other self-elected persons also serve on the CLIC. Some Implementing offices claimed that membership of CLIC in some communities had reduced. Although serving on the committee was voluntary, they suspected that the meager allowances offered them served to demotivate such members and they voluntarily opt out. The members are supposed to receive training on the targeting process, registration and other programme tasks. CLIC undertakes an initial identification and produces a list of potential beneficiary households based on their poverty status and presence of any one of the three categories of vulnerable groups ie OVC, people over 65 years and people with severe disabilities. Respondents indicated that upon receipt of the list, they go back into the communities and validate the names before the list is sent to the LEAP management secretariat. It was suggested that if community members were not happy with some names on the initial list, then the problem is investigated and names struck out if need be. A proxy means test is administered by an agency contracted by the MGCSP and the households are ranked according to their poverty score and also checked against the eligibility criteria of the relevant category. This stage of the selection which is centrally carried out largely did away with a lot of the politics in the implementation process. Respondents were unanimous in their observation that the nature of politics that was played out at the community level did not affect the outcome of the final list. This is because making the first list does not guarantee that you will make the final list. As one implementing officer remarked:

Occasionally the politicians, friends and other big men call, come to you or invite you to their office and make demands for inclusion of certain people. Even if you promise them anything, the proposed beneficiary may not make the final list from Accra and may be disappointed so we act as professionals in our work.(District Implementing Officer 8)

At another level, there is a struggle to make sure that committee members belong to a particular political party so they can help their followers. One implementing officer recounted:

The new Assembly member came complaining that the CLIC members in place are all NPP and they were using LEAP for politics. He wanted to be a member because his party is in government and it was time to also help his party members.
(District Implementing Officer 5)

Another respondent indicated that:

The DCE called me and said it was time to propose some people in the party to serve on CLIC. I told him we will get back to him. You see it is not easy to do away with people who have done the work for so long and know how it is done and replace them with those who know nothing about the roles they are expected to play

(District Implementing officer 7)

E. Community perception of bias and transparency

Members of beneficiary communities have also supported the position that a lot of politicking goes on in the selection of households. They perceive that if they make the first list then they should receive payment. Once they do not get into the final list, then they have been deliberately taken off the list. This is a perception that must be corrected. It appears that at the community validation meeting, members are not briefed well on the methodology used to arrive at the final list. This perception of bias and lack of knowledge about the programme generally is also captured in studies conducted by Roelen & Chettri (2014) and OPM (2013). In this direction OPM (2013) observes that the transparency and consistency of CLIC membership selection is an important element in building perceptions of beneficiary communities in the area of elite capture, conflict of interest and transparency of the process.

X CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to explore the politics (if any) surrounding the implementation of Ghana's flagship social protection strategy designed to give cash transfers to the vulnerable and chronically poor in the Central region. The two political parties that have been in government since the start of the programme have ensured that LEAP has stayed on course at least in the design and implementation. From a pilot in 21 districts, the programme has been expanded to cover 126 districts and has focused on the orphan and vulnerable children, elderly over 65 years and the severely disabled who by the use of a poverty means test can be categorized as chronically poor. The selection of beneficiary communities and households has been improved, made rigorous and not left to the discretion of implementing committees although in the past, attempts have been made by some politicians and elites to capture and influence the process. One thing remains, donors will continue to influence the size of LEAP by their funding activities and discourses that influence whether and how the funding occurs; and local politicians will cash in, in an attempt to maximize their votes particularly in election years.

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