

The Politics of Social Cash Transfers Implementation: Insights from the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty Programme in Ghana

Gabriel Botchwey¹ & Ndangwa Noyoo²

Abstract

Social protection has become legitimised and embedded in the politics of many developing countries as a means to address poverty and social exclusion; and it has found favour across different political ideology adherents. This, in part, is due to recognition of its importance to help stabilise society through social safety-nets. However, this is not without challenges. This paper investigated the politics of social intervention implementation, utilization of transfer funds, and whether or not such programmes influence citizens' sense of loyalty and ability to criticise government, with a focus on the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) in Ghana. The study was conducted through qualitative semi-structured interviews in two districts in the central region of Ghana. Findings show that information and access to the programme was fairly available to all, and cash transfer funds were used for food, care of orphans and grandchildren, health expenses, security for loans, small businesses and home repairs. Findings also indicate that participation in programme did influence perception and sense of attachment to the state positively. However, whereas some beneficiaries felt constrained in their ability to criticise government, others were prepared to do so regardless of benefits received. Thus, it concludes that social interventions may limit the 'exercise of voice' but do not shut it down entirely; this remains an important finding for social interventions policy and democracy promotion.

Keywords: cash transfers; criticism of government; Ghana; loyalty; social protection.

¹ Associate Professor, Department of Political Science Education, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana & Visiting Fellow, Leiden University African Studies Centre, Leiden, Netherlands (Corresponding Author).

Email: gkabotchwey@uew.edu.gh

² Professor and Director, Southern Africa Policy and Development Nexus (SAPDN), & Research Fellow, Department of Social Work, University of the Free State, South Africa.

Email: ndangwa45@gmail.com

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Introduction

The importance of social protection in raising living standards of citizens has gained currency in development discourse in recent decades. Coming off the back of a socially and economically dislocated Africa, that to the most part, was engendered by Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP), some pundits saw social protection as a practical avenue needed to arrest the negative spiraling living conditions across Africa (Devereux et al., 2011; Lavers & Hickey, 2016; Handa et al. 2021). Traditionally a concern of industrialised economies, social protection has emerged as a critical tool to improve living conditions of people, especially the poorest and most marginalised and to mitigate the effects of crises and shocks. Today, almost every country in the world has at least some form of social protection (UNDP 2016:14). Though social protection has been embraced in most regions of the developing world, this has been accompanied by intense scrutiny. For example, the recent study by Saichiwena and Seekings (2023) have pointed to the disjuncture between institutionalization of social protection and allocation of statutory funding in Zambia, where the government undertook massive expansion of beneficiary registrations under the social cash transfer programme but failed to provide the necessary funding. Early on, Stephen Kidd (2017) had also argued that, in some instances, people eligible for social protection schemes may be excluded in developing countries for several reasons: these limited coverage and budgets; design and implementation challenges; inability of potential beneficiaries to access the scheme stemming from identification and registration barriers; and exclusion through enforcement of scheme conditions or other barriers. Notwithstanding this positive trend, more scholarly work is needed to shed further light on how such programmes are implemented, whether or not they benefit citizens, and their influence on citizen's perception of the state and ability to criticize government.

The objective of this study was to investigate the politics surrounding social cash transfer programmes with a focus on the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty introduced in 2008 in Ghana. This was undertaken with the view to shed further light on the implementation processes, utilisation of cash transfers, beneficiaries' perception of importance of the cash transfers, and how these influence their loyalty to the state. The key questions addressed by this paper include the following: how was the social cash transfer programme implemented, and were there any political influences? How do citizens utilise the cash transfers, and perceive its importance to their livelihood? How do such programmes influence their perceptions of the state and their ability to criticise government?

Social Protection and State-Citizen Relations

Recent research that explored the influence of social protection on state-citizen relations include Beland et al. (2018); Grisolia et al. (2023); Ulriksen and Plagerson (2023); Hemsteede (2023); Seekings et al. (2023); Ibrahim (2023) and Alik-Lagrange et al. (2021). The work of Beland et al. (2023) examined the relationship between social intervention programmes, social citizenship and identity formation, and argued that such interventions should not be undertaken based on purely economic considerations because they are key to nation-building and democratic development; this is partly because such interventions help reduce resistance taxation and enable access to basic services to the poor in society. However, this may occur where there is active state participation in funding and implementation, but the outcome could be different if sponsorship and implementation are left in the hands of non-state actors. For example, Grisolia et al. (2023) studied social cash transfers provided by a non-state actor and its effect on legitimacy and found that the provision of cash transfers elicited positive effects on the legitimacy of the beneficiaries towards the non-state actor, but generated the unintended effect of crowding out duty bearers at the local level. Thus, while the involvement of non-state actors in the provision of social protection may relieve government of some responsibilities, this could create unintended conflict between non-state actors and the government in situations where such relations are poorly managed. Furthermore, Seekings et al. (2023) revealed that the expansion of social protection programmes helps to strengthen rights-based citizenship and claims on the state, but it comes with the risk of entrenching paternalistic attitudes of duty bearers towards citizens, especially beneficiaries of such interventions.

The study on social cash transfers by Hemsteede (2023) in Lesotho and Malawi also noted that donor involvement in implementation, especially in targeting, has greater likelihood to create new streams of beneficiaries; however, their involvement in implementation may foster stronger relations with donors rather than the state. In situations, where the state involved in provision and implementation, relations between beneficiaries and the state are more likely to be strengthened. This position was supported by the study of Ibrahim in Ghana (2023), which reported that implementation of social protection programmes may increase citizens' perception of the state as a provider of welfare, especially those excluded from basic services; the findings also suggest the value of social interventions may go beyond poverty reduction and human development, and lead to a revision of citizens' perception of the state. These findings support the argument of Ali-Lagrange et al. (2021) that social assistance programmes in sub-Saharan Africa could impact state-society relations and impact the social contract through targeting approaches, conditionality and accountability measures that may be adopted. In contrast to these findings, a review of the literature on social

protection and citizen-state relations involving recipients, non-recipients, citizens and non-citizens, did not find any conclusive evidence that the introduction of social interventions increased loyalty or legitimacy to the state (Ulriksen and Plagerson 2023).

This study goes beyond existing literature by closely examining the politics of implementing social interventions to investigate whether it affects the ability of citizens to criticize government, or ‘exercise voice’ as expected in a democracy. This is done by first investigating matters which are incidental to the implementation of the social cash transfer programme, followed by democratic exercise of voice or criticism of government.

Social Policy Interventions in Ghana

At independence, Ghana’s policy-makers prioritized direct state investment in social and human services such as education, health-care, housing, social security and employment opportunities as initial steps in the sequence of activities necessary for socio-economic advancement (Kpessa-Whyte, 2021). Nonetheless, Kpessa-Whyte (2021) reminds us that what was unique during the early independence period was the role of social policy. He contends that social policy was bold in committing public funds to the creative design of specific social policies to produce inclusiveness and to inculcate a sense of citizen loyalty to the state as a way of weaning them off their primordial affinities. However, he does concede that there was no doubt about the government’s primary objective of promoting industrialisation, as it was well understood that its pursuit could not be possible without the necessary skilled human resources and expertise. Moreover, a national environment in which the health and overall dignity of the citizens constituted a priority for collective action was needed (Kpessa-Whyte, 2021).

It has been argued that social protection in Ghana dates back to the pre-independence era, where community members were each other’s keeper (Ahenkan 2018, p. 128). Even though not documented, Ghanaians had a way of protecting each other and planning for the future as found with modern-day social security and pension schemes. Parental roles were not limited to one’s biological parents, but to any adult in the society. People saw every child as their own and hence could provide any form of assistance. The aged were catered for by friends, relatives or basically the extended family system. What Ahenkan (2018) is alluding to here is Ghana’s pre-colonial and communal state of existence and its systems. This indigenous system cushioned indigenous Ghanaians from colonial neglect and brutality, but is rarely highlighted in modern-day social protection discourses. However, the system of protecting individuals and families from want and destitution always serves as a vital safety-net whenever modern systems

of social protection collapse. A similar position has been reiterated by Awortwi (2018), who states that in Africa, the state is not the largest responder to poverty and vulnerability, but rather, non-state actors play more leading roles within this space. This was quite evident across sub-Saharan Africa at the height of the SAP of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Hence, there is a need to embed indigenous communal support systems into public policy and social policy analyses across Africa if the continent is to arrive at local and indigenous models of social protection which are relevant and readily respond to the needs of Africans. Boon and Yeboah (2018, p. 155) have discussed the Government of Ghana's (GoG) reforms in the formal social security system to address key challenges of access by informal sector actors to social security, and to ensure that contributors take control and guarantee income and livelihood in old age. The National Pensions Act, 2008 (Act 766) allows people in the informal sector to make contributions to their pensions and save for short-to-medium-term needs; however, participation by informal sector workers has been very low but is expected to pick following new enrolment drives by the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (Botchwey 2021; 2023).

The LEAP Social Protection Programme in Ghana

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines social protection as “a set of nationally owned policies and instruments that provide income support and facilitates access to goods and services by all households and individuals, at least, at the minimally accepted levels, to protect them from deprivation and social exclusion, particularly during periods of insufficient income, incapacity or inability to work” (UNDP, 2016, p.12). This definition has been operationalised in the design and implementation of several social protection programmes including the LEAP in Ghana. The LEAP programme targets persons in extreme poverty, and the stated criteria for participation in the programme include households with orphaned and vulnerable children, persons living with severe disability without any productive capacity, and elderly persons who are 65 years and above without any form of support (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, 2022). With a population of 30.8 million, according to the 2021 Population and Housing Census (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2021), Ghana still suffers high levels of consumption poverty and multidimensional poverty. The 2020 report by the Ghana Statistical Service on multidimensional poverty revealed that 45.6% of Ghanaians remained dimensionally poor, with 23.4% living in consumption poverty and 19.3% suffering both consumption and multidimensional poverty (GSS, 2020, p. X). In the central region of the country, within which this study was conducted, the multidimensional poverty indicator was as high as 0.239, with an incidence of 47.6%, and a poverty intensity of 50.1% (GSS, 2020, p. 27). The report also revealed

several pockets of urban poverty in the region though it was more pronounced in rural communities (see table 1 below). The central region is not alone in this regard in terms of poverty intensity and incidence levels as evidenced in the GSS report. Thus, it could be argued that social protection programmes are needed across the country to address the high levels poverty within both rural and urban populations in Ghana.

Table 1: Poverty in Ghana

MPI, headcount ratio and intensity - Central Region			
	MPI	Incidence (%)	Intensity (%)
National	0.236	45.6	51.7
Western	0.235	47.6	49.4
Central	0.239	47.6	50.1
Greater Accra	0.102	22.5	45.5
Volta	0.306	58.2	52.7
Eastern	0.217	44.0	49.3
Ashanti	0.147	31.1	47.5
Brong Ahafo	0.255	49.4	51.6
Northern	0.491	80.8	60.7
Upper East	0.359	68.1	52.8
Upper West	0.348	65.5	53.1

Source: Adapted from Multidimensional Poverty Report, Ghana Statistical Service June 2020.

The work of Handa et al. (2021) highlights the expansion of social protection programmes in Africa and shows that 46 out of 53 countries on the continent have initiated some form of social protection programme, dominated by cash transfers. Findings from their study indicated that the programmes have led to improvements in food security, livelihoods, and the well-being of children, and were linked to poverty reduction programmes. Other recent studies on social protection in the Global South showing significant changes in the lives of beneficiaries include Niño-Zarazúa and Hernández (2021, p. 520) on conditional cash transfers (CCTs) such as Brazil's Bolsa Familia and Mexico's *Progres-a-Oportunidades-Prospera*; social pensions such as South Africa's Old-Age Pension and India's

Ghandi National Old-Age Pension Scheme; pure cash transfers such as China's (urban and rural) DiBao and South Africa's Child Support Grant (CSG); and public works such as Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme and India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme.

Notwithstanding these, Grunewald (2022) has argued that governments may use social protection programmes to bind citizens in order to ensure survival of their regimes, and to consolidate their power. Along similar lines, Abou-Chadi and Immergut (2019) also assert that as electoral politics become more competitive, political parties are more likely to focus on policies that maximise their votes even when they depart from their traditional political ideologies. Furthermore, a study by Razavi et al. (2020) discussed how the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic served as an impetus for states to return to their neglected responsibilities as duty-bearers under the social contract between citizens and the state. Do such efforts from governments demonstrate faith and commitment to social protection or are they simply exploiting the programmes for political gains? It remains uncertain whether these efforts would be sustained under current global economic pressures in the post Covid-19 era. Furthermore, these endeavours often take on political overtones with the citizenry ascribing them to only the party that is in power and not considering the contributions made by other key actors. In this regard, social protection is an initiative within which the state plays a prominent role. Anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that the LEAP programme in Ghana is not insulated from political influences. In view of these, this study investigated how social protection programmes shape citizens' attitudes towards the state, and other important matters incidental to the social protection programme.

Conceptual Framework: Loyalty, Voice, and Exit

The seminal work of Albert Hirschman (1970): *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* provides a suitable conceptual backdrop to this study, though it was originally proposed in relation to businesses. Hirschman (1970) argued that when consumers are dissatisfied with a product or service, they may quit as consumers by exercising exit, or express their displeasure and discontent with the view to get their issues addressed, through voice. Level of loyalty can therefore be discerned from the type of response people choose in the face of dissatisfaction. People with higher levels of loyalty prefer to delay exit, and express voice in order to demand better products or services, treatment, or behaviour from an organisation or institution; those with lower levels of loyalty choose exit more quickly, and people without any alternative tend to remain indifferent. He argued that as loyalty increases, the likelihood that a person would choose voice also increases and vice versa. In other words, criticism from people against government policy or programme

may not necessarily imply disloyalty as often misunderstood in the public arena, but may imply the reverse. However, the exercise of alternative choice proposed by Hirshman assumes the agency of citizens to choose from a range of options, which may not apply to those without any alternative from what is provided by the government. Cohen and Filc (2017) also found in their study of informal health care payments in Israel that expression of voice did not always relate to dissatisfaction, and that lack of loyalty did not necessarily lead people to exit, especially where there are no real alternatives or due to indifference.

Healy (2007, pp.744–746) identified different dimensions of loyalty and pointed out that it may develop in relation to a person or some object and may be vertical (between a ruler and the ruled), or horizontal (between citizens in a democracy). She further explored the tensions associated with expression of loyalty with reference to interferences that could stem from personal convictions, elevation of interests of others above one's own, and complications from feelings of attachment. In their study of Swedish social services, Welander et al. (2019) found that role conflicts in the work environment were positively associated with exit, throwing further light on the horizontal dynamics of loyalty.

Recent research by Volpi and Benzenin (2023) have also adopted Hirshman's concept of voice, loyalty and exit to explain how political movements articulate and push forward their interests and agenda, in order to mobilise support in Algerian politics. In their study, they found that political movements express voice through visible anti-regime behaviour, exit as behaviour that alienates from the political regime, and loyalty as comprising a spectrum of true believers, opportunists and uncommitted citizens who focus on avoiding repression or sanctions from the regime. Frapporti and Pirone (2023) have also used Hirschman's concept of exit, voice and loyalty to explain the relationship between workers in the platform economy and their organisations or companies in Bologna City in Italy. They found that workers express voice through protest against unfair treatment while remaining with their organisations; quit the companies to be on their own as expression of exit; or stay bound to the companies in an 'all-weather' relationship, depending on availability of viable alternatives. Thus, the concepts of loyalty, voice and exit proposed by Hirschman would serve as a useful backdrop to help explain the dynamics of relations between citizens, the government or political parties in connection with social protection interventions.

Methodology

An empirical study was undertaken parallel to the conceptualisation of this paper. This was done to allow for the augmentation of the research findings with the paper's theoretical position and assumptions. Also, it was important to bring

evidence from the empirical research into this paper to enrich and strengthen our arguments. The research used a case study research design with stated criteria for inclusion of participants. The first criterion was that participants must have enrolled for the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme as beneficiaries for a period of at least two years, and they must have received stipends or payments under the programme. The next target group included people who participated in the selection process for the LEAP but were not accepted as beneficiaries. Based on this criteria, two municipalities in the central region of Ghana, namely, Agona West Municipal and Effutu Municipal – with similar standing as local governments, were identified as areas where such participants could be found. These municipalities were chosen as typical case studies since they reflected many of the characteristics one would find in municipalities and districts in Ghana. Thereafter, letters were written to the coordinating offices of the LEAP programme in the municipalities to inform them about the study and to seek their support in identifying the participants. The network or referral sampling approach was used to identify participants (since they fairly knew each other) with the support of the municipalities' programme coordinators.

Figure 1: Map of Ghana Showing Study Area (Central Region, arrowed)



Source: Ghana Districts, 2024 (<https://www.ghanadistricts>)

The research team was able to reach at least 50 participants from the two municipalities (26 from Agona West and 24 from Effutu) composed of 19 males and 31 females. Out of these participants, 29 of them had no schooling, eleven (11) had completed primary education, eight (8) had completed junior high school, and two (2) had completed senior high school, with none having attained tertiary education. With reference to age, six (6) participants fell within the age range of 30–39; four (4) within the age range 40–49; eight (8) within the age bracket 50–59; 15 within the age bracket 60–69; 12 within the age range 70–79; and five (5) within the age cohort 80–89. The coordinators of the programmes were also briefly interviewed to confirm information about selection processes and administration of the programme. All participants were interviewed in their homes at their preferred times. Each participant was informed at the outset of the interview that participation was voluntary, and that all information obtained would be used for research purposes only.

The research instrument used to collect information was an interview guide which had question items incidental to the social cash transfer programme implementation such as how they obtained information about LEAP, enrollment, years of being on LEAP, number of household members on the programme, amount of stipends received every two months, regularity of receipt of the stipends; utilization of the funds; whether or not LEAP had been beneficial to them, and in what ways. This was followed by items including LEAP and loyalty to the state or political party; problems associated with the programme and any other information from the respondents. Data was collected in face-to-face interviews from March to May 2022, and analysed thematically to identify patterns, similarities, differences, nuances, and other important relationships in view of the research questions. Secondary data was obtained from published research, reports, and official documents. The key findings are presented in the following sections beginning with matters incidental to implementation of the social intervention, use of cash transfer payments, loyalty to government and political party, and other challenges associated with the programme.

Information about LEAP and Enrollment

In interviews, most participants indicated that they learned about the LEAP programme either from community centre announcements, introduction by a friend already enrolled in the programme, home visits by officials of the social welfare department and LEAP, co-tenants, or at pensioners' meetings. Enrollment unto the LEAP involved administration of a Proxy Means Test (PMT) questionnaire to select qualifying beneficiaries. Participants indicated that after initial contact with LEAP officials or upon receipt of information about the programme, they were invited to

the social welfare office to be interviewed. They answered questions about their living conditions, poverty levels, economic activities, financial circumstances, and others. Some indicated that they were asked to pay GHS10 which was equivalent to USD1.40 as the registration fee (USD 1 was equivalent to GHS 7.112, at time of data collection in April 21, 2022; Bank of Ghana Exchange Rate). After this payment, their pictures were taken, and were issued identification cards.

Some participants who were not accepted stated that: “enrollment is based on who knows you or whom you know” (male, 51, May 26, 2022). Another stated that: “leaders of the group [selection team] are not honest and faithful in the selection” (female, 59, May 26, 2022), and one also stated: “I personally think that becoming a beneficiary should be open to all and not selected few, please” (male, 38, May 21, 2022). Some also indicated that they participated in the selection process but were told that they were not included on the final list without any explanation about why they were excluded (female, 35, May 23, 2022). There was an instance where a participant indicated that he was excluded from the LEAP due to complaints he made, and stated as follows:

I used to join but I am no longer a member. I complained bitterly about the payment of money which is not even enough and even comes every two months; and, I must go up and down before getting hold of this sum (male, 64 years, May 26, 2022).

One respondent also stated that LEAP should never be partisan in the selection of beneficiaries but must remain available to all who qualify (male, 63 years, April 6, 2022). This respondent was pointing to political undertones in the selection of beneficiaries. From the statements of the respondents, although information about the social protection programme was readily available, they found the selection process problematic, manipulated and lacking transparency.

Use of the Cash Transfer Payments

One of the key questions of the study was whether LEAP had been beneficial to the participants and in which ways. Most respondents indicated that the transfer of payments had been beneficial to them in various ways: the funds were used for food, payment of rent, home repairs (fixing of roof), care of grandchildren and orphans; payment for healthcare expenses, setting up small businesses (selling firewood), security for loans and payment of school-related expenses of children living with them. Commenting on these in interviews, some stated that at least every two months they expected to get some money to buy food for themselves and their families (female, 37, March 31, 2022). Others indicated that they used the money to pay their rent or to take care of their grandchildren, if their parents

did not earn any income (female, 69 years, March 28, 2022; female, 78 years, April 6, 2022).

Other participants indicated that the money was used to look after orphans living with them (male, 70 years, March 30, 2022), or to pay their health care expenses because the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) only covered part of the costs (female, 78 years, March 31, 2022). A female participant also indicated that she used the money for business activities such as selling firewood to make some profit to cater for family needs (female, 40 years, March 30, 2022). Some participants also used the LEAP payment as security for loans to cater for domestic needs and the repayment of debts (female, 69 years, March 30, 2022).

The LEAP cash transfers also served as a last resort for many beneficiaries to sustain their livelihoods. For example, a widowed participant indicated that after the death of her husband, LEAP payments helped her to take care of her children; she also used some of the money to pay for re-roofing of their home as well as undertake some maintenance works on the house. She indicated that she was able to do this with profit gained from a small business funded by the cash transfer payments (female, 65 years, April 1, 2022).

A male participant also indicated that LEAP had helped him when he was nearly dying of hunger and sickness during the Covid-19 pandemic, and that it was the payments that helped him survive the crisis (male, 83 years, March 28, 2022). Some other participants indicated that they used the money to cater for school needs of their grandchildren to enable them to complete school. Although some participants considered the payments too small to meet their needs, they concurred that half a loaf was better than nothing. However, it is fair to state that most of the participants considered transfer payments very crucial for their livelihood, and they applied the funds judiciously, sometimes, beyond expectation. This is because even though the funds are expected to be used mainly for consumption expenses, some beneficiaries used some of the funds for business activities which generated enough profit to undertake home repairs and to fund some education and health expenses. To this end, the funds were seen to be very important by the beneficiaries, in spite of the amounts being small and the perennial delays.

Loyalty to Government and 'Exercise of Voice' or Criticism

Data from interviews indicated elements of loyalty to the political party which introduced the programme or during whose administration the beneficiaries were enrolled on LEAP. Others indicated loyalty to the government (government/country/state were used interchangeably by participants) that prevented

them from criticising unacceptable public policies or behaviour, which could be characterised as silence; other participants indicated that they still criticised the government irrespective of benefits received from LEAP and that loyalty should not be based on benefits received. For example, one participant indicated that participation in the LEAP had compelled him to vote for the New Patriotic Party (NPP) that introduced the programme because he thought that they had done something good for the poor (male, 76 years, April 6, 2022). Others indicated that the LEAP programme showed that the government sympathised with the poor, and therefore they would do everything in their power to support the government so that their stipends would continue to be disbursed.

Some participants also indicated that their participation in LEAP had increased their love and respect for the government (male, 70 years, March 30, 2022), and that “one should never hurt the hand that fed them” (female, 69 years, March 30, 2022). Another woman stated that ever since she joined LEAP, she had never in any way castigated the government (female, 78 years, March 28, 2022). One male participant also stated that he would be dead by now if it had not been for LEAP, and so he really appreciated the government, and supports any policy that would shape the country (male, 83 years, March 28, 2022). Other comments indicating loyalty and feeling of attachment to the state or government include the following:

The benefits of LEAP have made me understand the care the government has for us the vulnerable; doing anything to support the country is my pleasure (male, 72 years, March 30, 2022).

The government did very well to have brought that initiative and I am ready to serve her in any way (male, 68 years, March 30, 2022).

However, some participants shared different views and indicated that their loyalty to the country or state was not dependent on the benefits received from LEAP and argued that loyalty could not be held to ransom by government support such as LEAP. They also noted that they always did what was needed to be done as citizens and not because of the stipends (male, 59 years, March 30, 2022), and this view was shared by another respondent who stated that loyalty to the country should be a moral deed and not dependent on benefits (male, 73 years, March 30, 2022).

Another important position that emerged was that loyalty to the state must not depend on any specific gains but seen as duty by all citizens. A participant reinforced this position by stating that that everyone has to be loyal to the country regardless of the benefits he or she received (male, 71 years, April 6, 2022). With regard to receipt of benefits under LEAP and ability to criticize government, a

female participant stated that she always condemned what was bad regardless of the benefits she received from the persons involved in such behaviour whether in government or not (female, 69 years, April 6, 2022).

Thus, the general pattern of responses regarding loyalty, voice and benefits under LEAP indicates that the payments increase the feeling of attachment to the state since beneficiaries see the state or government as caring for them. The payments also draw some beneficiaries to the government or political parties under whose administration they were enrolled on the LEAP. It is also the case that many of the beneficiaries feel obliged to support the government, but it does not prevent them from criticizing policies or condemning actions which they consider wrong. Furthermore, loyalty was seen as more of national duty and not necessarily based on benefits received under the social protection programme.

Other Challenges Associated with LEAP

The problems which were identified by participants of the LEAP programme included problematic selection processes, long delays before stipends were paid (sometimes delay of payments for more than six months instead of every two months); amounts being insufficient to meet living expenses as the cost of living continued to rise; suspicious anomalies in payments to beneficiaries; and claims of unqualified persons receiving transfer payments.

The process of selecting beneficiaries was seen as problematic, and it emerged that some social welfare workers were also registered as beneficiaries of LEAP and were receiving payments (male, 68 years, March 30, 2022). Some participants indicated that upon the death of beneficiaries, some social welfare or LEAP officers did not delete the name of the person but fraudulently accessed the stipends for themselves (male, 59 years, March 30, 2022). Some participants also indicated that there were ghost names (fictitious vulnerable persons) on the LEAP payment lists, that were used to collect payments illegally; and that these names had to be eliminated (male, 72 years, March 30, 2022).

One of the main problems concerned inconsistencies in the amounts paid as stipends, leading some participants to assert that they were not receiving full amounts allocated to them because the amounts they received kept changing with no justifiable reasons (female, 60 years, April 5, 2022). The 2015 official amount of the stipends approved for LEAP remained the same at the time of data collection in 2022, which comprised the following for every two months: a household with one qualifying person receives GHS 64; a household with two (2) qualifying persons receives GHS 76; a household with three (3) qualifying persons receives GHS 88; and a household with four (4) or more qualifying persons

receives GHS 106 (Botchwey, 2021; Hamel and Flowers, 2018).

In the Agona West Municipality, interviews showed that payments received by beneficiaries was very close to the officially approved stipends under the LEAP. However, in the Effutu Municipality, the amounts indicated by participants differed significantly. Some households with one qualifying person received amounts ranging from GHS 60, GHS 64, GHS 72, GHS 74, GHS 76, and GHS 120. Households with two qualifying members received between GHS 100 and GHS 120; and households with three (3) qualifying members showed the greatest variation of GHS 64, GHS 75 and GHS 84; and beneficiaries in rural communities reported the widest variations.

Commenting on these, some participants believed that those who distributed the stipends took some of their money, stating the following:

“I think they can do something about the way they distribute the money because those who serve as middle people do take advantage of us” (male, 72 years, April 1, 2022).

“I know that I am not receiving what I am supposed to get” (female, 33 years, April 1, 2022).

“At first, I know that there was fairness but now I have realised that they don’t give us the actual money we deserve” (female, 65 years, April 1, 2022).

It was also suggested that alternative ways of paying the stipends to physically weak participants should be considered instead of asking them to come to the stations or social welfare offices to receive the money (male, 83 years, March 28, 2022). This was because some of them cannot move easily and they have to be transported to the venues at their own expense, incurring additional costs. Some participants also proposed that home visits should be undertaken by social welfare workers as part of the programme so that they could check on the welfare of beneficiaries under the social protection programme (female, 71 years, March 28, 2022).

Discussion and Reflections

From the data presented above, it can be surmised that citizens who participated in the study had multiple sources of information about LEAP and were able to inform themselves about its benefits. However, it was also worrisome to observe that some participants were asked to pay GHS10 by the government officials running the LEAP. Since this was a programme for the poor, asking them to pay

a registration fee was not only baffling, but seemed to suggest that it was some form of gatekeeping or corruption. What if one did not have the registration fee, then what would happen?

It can be generally argued that the information flow about LEAP was not controlled or restricted by government officials. This could mean that there was some transparency regarding information about the LEAP programme and that anyone who was eligible could participate in the selection process. However, some people went through the selection process and were rejected without giving them any reasons. Others were removed from the programme for complaining about difficulties associated with the cash amounts and mode of disbursement. There were also comments which indicated favouritism and political undertones in the determination of the final list of beneficiaries. It appears that while information about the programme was not shrouded in secrecy, the selection process was problematic, with strong political undercurrents regarding who may or may not benefit from the cash transfer programme. While there is no direct evidence to suggest that the social protection programme was being used to mobilise or reward party supporters, comments by some participants that 'LEAP must never be partisan', or that participation depended on who one knew or was known to the politicians, point to the need to remain vigilant about possible partisan exploitation by politicians.

Research by Handa et al. (2021) indicate that social protection programmes such as cash transfers help improve food security, livelihoods, and foster well-being of children. In this study, we also found that recipients of transfers used the stipends for food, healthcare expenses, care of orphans living with them, to set up small businesses, and to maintain their homes, among others. For some, it remains an important source of income to deal with their poverty and was the main lifeline during the Covid-19 pandemic; this was also observed by Razani et al. (2020) in their study. However, it remains to be seen whether resurgence of state support for the vulnerable demonstrated during the pandemic will be sustained.

Comments from several participants indicated that their perception of the state and loyalty had been influenced by the support received under the social protection programme. Due to these benefits, some stated that they believe the government cared for the vulnerable and would do whatever they could to support the state to ensure that they continue to receive the stipends, or to serve the state in any way possible. This finding confirms research by Ibrahim (2023) and Grisolia et al. (2023). Grunewald (2022) has argued that governments may use social protection programmes to bind citizens to themselves in order to consolidate their power. The views of participants indicating affection or loyalty towards government as a result of receiving benefits from the cash transfer programme may not be lost on politicians and may well explain why almost every

government wishes to introduce or extend such programmes to take advantage of recipients' loyalty. This may have led some beneficiaries to indicate that they never criticise the government (or must never hurt the hand that feeds them) and will support any policy introduced to ensure that they continued to receive their stipends. This is linked to silence or refusal to exercise voice even though they are loyal. Hirschman's theory (1970) on loyalty indicates that as loyalty increases, 'exercise of voice' to demand better services, treatment or behaviour is also expected to increase. However, we found in our study that as loyalty increased, voice or criticism may decrease. This may well constitute interference in convictions as a result of loyalty to the state as pointed out by Healy (2007). Notwithstanding this observation, some participants were of the view that loyalty to the state should not be dependent on benefits received through a social protection programme but it must be seen as a moral obligation of citizens regardless of benefits gained. Such participants indicated that they condemned the government for wrongdoing regardless of benefits received under the social protection programme.

With regard to allegiance to political parties as a result of benefits from social protection programmes, evidence from this study indicated only a weak linkage. Abou-Chadi and Immergut (2019) have argued that as elective politics become more competitive, political parties ignore their traditional ideologies and adopt policies that maximise their votes. It appears this is what has occurred in Ghana due to pragmatic considerations. The New Patriotic Party is associated with conservative, market-driven policies. However, it was their administration that introduced the pro-poor LEAP programme which is associated with social democracy, an ideology which the National Democratic Congress in Ghana espouses. So here, we find support for the position of Abou-Chadi and Immergut (2019). Understandably, when the National Democratic Congress came to power in 2009, they did not abandon the LEAP but continued and expanded its coverage, perhaps, for political expediency reasons.

Indeed, only one participant explicitly indicated that his decision to vote for the New Patriotic Party in all elections was based on benefits received under LEAP. This is probably because succeeding governments have continued LEAP since its introduction in 2008. However, much of the evidence shows that beneficiaries were more positively disposed towards the state. The study also uncovered problems that need to be addressed such as inadequate amounts being disbursed as stipends, lengthy delays in release of the funds, inconsistencies in the amounts given to beneficiaries, and corruption in the distribution of stipends exemplified by unqualified persons receiving stipends. However, these did not lead them to exit the LEAP programme ostensibly because they do not have any viable alternatives.

Conclusion

A number of key findings emerged from this study. First, information about the social protection programme and enrolment processes were reasonably transparent, but the selection of the final beneficiaries list appears problematic and linked to partisan politics. Second, most participants indicated that the social protection programme had been beneficial to them, and they have used the stipends for food, care of orphans and grandchildren, paying for healthcare, school fees, roofing, home repairs and maintenance. Some of the respondents had set up small businesses such as selling firewood with the funds to support their families. Third, most of the participants indicated that their disposition towards the state had become more positive because of the benefits received under the social protection programme. They believed that the state cared about the vulnerable and were therefore willing to support the state in any way possible. However, this could limit their ability to criticise government for wrongdoing, with a few exceptions. It could therefore be argued that receiving benefits from a social protection programme could increase the loyalty or sense of attachment of citizens to the state. Based on evidence from this study, we conclude that access to social protection programmes remain open but may be manipulated to mobilise or reward partisan political supporters through targeting and uncertainties regarding final determination of beneficiaries list. Citizens generally view social protection programmes positively and use the funds for consumption and productive purposes. The programmes may positively influence the perceptions of citizens about the state as a result of benefits received. The more valuable they consider the benefits, the more positive their disposition towards the state. Finally, beneficiaries of social protection programmes are more likely to be loyal to the state, to the extent that it may limit their ability to criticize government, but does not curtail it completely. Despite receiving benefits, some participants were still prepared criticize government for wrongdoing.

Declaration

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