



## CHALLENGES OF THE LIVELIHOOD EMPOWERMENT AGAINST POVERTY PROGRAMME IN THE UPPER WEST REGION OF GHANA: THE INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract

*Since independence Ghana has embarked on various development strategies and programmes with the aim of reducing poverty and moving the country into a desired prosperous nation. Though initial successes were recorded making Ghana a beacon of hope in Africa these successes did not stand the test of time. Poverty reduction programmes became much popular in the 1980s with the introduction of Structural Adjustment programmes among others. However, after thirty years of implementing pro-poor programmes and policies to reduce poverty the results has been minimal with the current national poverty rate at 28.5% is an indication of a relatively high level of poverty in the country marked by widespread regional disparities. The high poverty levels also results in further social exclusion of citizens thereby widening the gap between the rich and poor. This paper focused on the specific poverty alleviation programme the livelihood empowerment against poverty implemented in the country since 2008. This paper examines the peculiar challenges that the programme faces in the Upper West region from the institutional perspective. Interviews from nine program officers from the various districts in the Upper West region provided data for this study. This was supplemented with secondary data using 2010 population and housing census, government publications on the LEAP programme, district statistics on the LEAP as well as relevant publications on LEAP in Ghana. The study revealed that some efforts have been made to hence the living conditions of the poor in the Upper West region through the programme. However the programme is challenged with administrative difficulties, irregular inflow of funds as well as perceived political interferences. Therefore, this paper recommends that poverty reduction programmes such as this should be sustained and made more efficient by improving the administrative capacity of programme officers. The study further recommends the provision of more complementary benefits to beneficiaries and also giving some non-formal education and training to beneficiaries in the best use of funds.*

**Keywords: Poverty reduction, Livelihoods empowerment programme, Challenges, Upper West region, Institutional perspective**

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### Introduction

Development is a process and therefore requires concerted efforts to see it come to fruition. That explains why every nation worth its sort strives to

achieve development through various efforts and strategies. Ghana since independence in 1957 has traversed this development path with various

development programs and policies aimed at raising the standard of living and alleviating poverty. Since independence various development strategies and programmes were embarked upon with the aim of reducing poverty and moving the country into a desired prosperous nation. Though initial successes were recorded making Ghana a beacon of hope in Africa these successes did not stand the test of time. Poverty reduction programmes in Ghana became much popular in the 1980s with the introduction of Structural Adjustment programmes among others.

However, after more than thirty years of implementing pro-poor programmes and policies to reduce poverty the results has been minimal with the current national poverty rate at 28.5% is an indication of a relatively high level of poverty in the country marked by widespread regional disparities (Ghana Statistical service, 2008). The high poverty levels also results in further social exclusion of citizens thereby widening the gap between the rich and poor. The increased levels of poverty over the years further question the nature and manner in which pro-poor programmes have been implemented and whether they yield the desired results.

Ghana since the year 2000 has made efforts to reduce poverty through various pro-poor programmes such as the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty, Medium and Small Loans, National Health Insurance Scheme, School Feeding Programme. Even though these programmes have made various degrees of impact poverty levels still remain high. This cast into the light the implementation challenges that beleaguered such pro-poor programmes. This paper therefore focuses on the challenges of the specific poverty alleviation programme the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty implemented in the country since 2008. This paper examines the peculiar challenges that the programme faces in the Upper West region.

Since the implementation of the programme in 2008 several researches have been conducted on the programme aimed at various aspect of the programme. However there has been an over concentration of research on the benefits of the programme to beneficiaries and the number of people covered (Agbaam and Dinbabo, 2014; Handa and Park, 2012; Darko, 2011). What has been neglected in these researches is an overall examination of the challenges of the programme from the point of view of programme officers who are indirectly involved in the implementation of the programme (the institutional perspective). For instance Darko (2011) investigated the extent to which LEAP and other possible social grant policies will impact on poverty, inequality and government fiscals in Ghana. The major finding of this research was on the impact of the LEAP on household economy. Also in 2013 the Food and Agriculture organization conducted a research into the economic impact of cash transfer programmes in sub Saharan Africa using the LEAP as Ghana's case study. The study revealed that the LEAP programme enabled households to invest in a number of economic activities and also increase economic activities within the localities.

Again in another research conducted by Handa and Park (2012) which was a base line study was aimed at describing the sample and also how to target the poor, as well as estimate potential effects of the program. This was followed by an impact evaluation research and a further research on the operations of LEAP. These researches revealed broad range of factors that characterized the operations of LEAP. However they fell short of unearthing the challenges of LEAP.

The above evidence demonstrates the dearth of research and data on the challenges of LEAP as a social grant programme aimed at poverty reduction in Ghana. This is the gap that this research intends to fill and hence provide areas of further research and policy.

## Contextual Issues

### Background/trajjectory of pro-poor policies in Ghana

Pro-poor policies or more broadly social protection policies have existed since independence. These took various forms and types and can be described as having achieved some measures of successes. However, as society and population increased these programmes underwent change to suit the exigencies of the times. The idea behind most or all social protection programmes in Ghana was to reduce inequality and poverty in Ghanaian society, by subsidizing the provision of basic social services such as education, health, water and sanitation (Abebrese, 2011). Therefore some social protection existed in almost every ministry, department or agency of government with the aim to target, locate and intervene to reduce poverty across board.

Pro-poor programmes broadly categorise under the spectrum of social protection started in Ghana with the introduction of social security and pensions. The social security act of 1965 created for people particularly civil and public servants some measure of social security. This was against the backdrop that people in the course of their work may be rendered incapacitated due to hazardous working conditions, accidents due to work and old age. This may render such people poor and vulnerable and they may be unable to work to cater for basic needs including health, accommodation and food requirements. Therefore the act established a scheme where workers contributed to a funded and enjoyed some benefits. Various benefits existed under the scheme including a provident fund scheme, lump sum payment for old age, invalidity and survivor's benefits. This scheme is still in existence and has seen improvement of the years (Abebrese, 2011). For instance in 1991 the social security law

converted the provident fund into a pension scheme and is been managed by the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT). The pension scheme hold contributions of members in trust and pay contributors a percentage of their contributions depending on the number of years served and the amount of their contributions per month. The scheme's sources of funds include contributions of 17.5% in total of the monthly workers' salaries. This is made up of 5% deduction from employee salary and 12.5% contribution by the employer. The self-employed are expected to contribute the total amount of 17.5% by themselves. This social security scheme still runs till today in addition to other forms of social protection. For instance the three tier pension scheme recently introduced.

From 2000-2005 the government's poverty reduction programme was tailored into its development agenda titled the Ghana Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS I). This was established to fast track the achievement of the millennium development goals and a key component of the MDGs was poverty reduction with a goal to reduce poverty by halve in 2015. This implied that government had to design pro-poor programmes within the GPRS to address poverty including reducing extreme poverty. Therefore in 2003 the National Health insurance scheme was started which provided health care to the poor using the principle of cross subsidization (source). The NHIS is financed by the premiums of subscribers (one has to register and then to pay a premium depending on ones income). In addition a 2.5% National Health Insurance Levy, another 2.5% SSNIT deductions from the formal sector, funds from Government of Ghana to be allocated by the Parliament and returns from investment by the NHIS authority constitute the sources of funds for the scheme. Also in 2005 the school feeding programme was introduced. This was non-contributory and aims at stimulating educational outcomes. The programme provided

one hot meal a day for pupils in basic schools. This idea of poverty reduction was carried forward into a Ghana Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy II document which lasted between 2006-2009.

Following the separate and haphazard ways in which pro-poor programmes have been implemented over the years there was the need to put all social protection programmes under one body. Therefore in 2007 the national social protection strategy was launched. Under this programmes various social protection programmes were implemented or run. These include:

- The Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) started in 2008. This is Social Cash Transfers and free health insurance. Membership is for the extreme poor, orphans and vulnerable people.

- Labour Intensive Public Works implemented under the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development
- The Exempt Category under the National Health Insurance Scheme implemented under Ministry of Health
- Pro-Poor interventions for poor peasant farmers including “Block Farming” under the Ministry of Food and Agric
- Free School Uniform and Exercise books implemented under Ministry of Education
- School Feeding Programme Under Ministry of Local Government
- Capitation Grant under Ministry of Education
- Local Enterprise and Skills Development Programme (LESDEP)
- National Youth Employment Programme /Ghana Youth Employment and Enterprise Development Programme

Table 1 below show the history social protection programmes in Ghana.

**Table 1: Evolution of Social Protection Programmes in Ghana**

<b>Social protection programme</b>	<b>Focus and target population</b>
Social Security Act 1965	lump sum payment for old age, invalidity and survivor`s benefits
Social Security Law 1991	Formal/private/informal sector workers-
Ghana Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS I) 2002-2005	Millennium Development Goals of the UN/target poverty reduction
National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) 2003	Provide affordable Health to citizens/cross subsidy for poor
Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) 2005	Encourage school enrollment and provide affordable education
Ghana Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy II (GPRS II) 2006-2009	Focus on Ghana becoming a middle income country by 2015

National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) 2007	Several Social Protection programmes started under the strategy (e.g. LEAP)
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Source: Abebrese, 2011

The trend and evolution of social protection in Ghana gives the indication that the quest for poverty reduction has been a long term dream and the efforts been made are also duly recognized. However, in the implementation of these programmes several challenges were encountered. The question therefore is how these challenges were dealt with. This is because the ability to comprehensively address challenges in one programme would inform policy making as regards other similar programmes or forestall the occurrence of similar challenges in other poverty reduction programmes.

### **Background to the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty Programme (LEAP)**

The Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty programme is one of the social protection tools of the Government of Ghana to alleviate poverty especially among the poorest of the poor considered as the extreme poor. It is part of the Ghana National Social Protection Strategy which was launched in 2008 (Ministry of Gender and Social Protection, 2013). The broad objectives of the National Social Protection Strategy are to establish a new social grant scheme to provide a basic and secure income for the most vulnerable households. The strategy also aims to target poverty better so as to inform other existing social protection programmes and lastly provide a package of complementary services for beneficiaries of Social Protection programmes (Ministry of Gender and Social Protection, 2013).

The LEAP is therefore one of the social protection programmes implemented by the government to address poverty particularly of the extreme poor in society. The LEAP programme was started in 2008. The aim of LEAP specifically was to

provide a safety net for the poorest and most marginalised groups in Ghanaian society, especially the bottom 20% of the extreme poor in Ghana. The programme therefore seeks to protect and empower extremely poor families consisting of the elderly (aged 65 and above), the disabled who are unable to work, and carers of Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) by providing them financial support (cash grants), as well as access to complementary services such as the National Health Insurance Scheme and enrollment of children in school.

Since its inception in 2008 the programme has made some gains. Currently the programme covers over 71,000 households since 2013 (Ministry of Gender and Social Protection, 2013). According to the Ministry of Gender and Social protection the LEAP cash programme has impacted on beneficiaries and families in areas such as food security, health, education, savings and investments, as well as on their wider communities particularly in terms of community development and economic growth (MGSP, 2013). For instance, in the area of education the Ministry acknowledges that older children of schooling age (13-17 year) were enrolled in schools. Furthermore in terms of health LEAP has led to a significant increase in the number of children aged 6-17 and aged 0-5 enrolled in the National Health Insurance Scheme. Further evidence suggests that the programme has also increased investment, trading and created employment for some beneficiaries (Drako, 2011; Handa & Park, 2012). For instance the MGSP has intimated that some beneficiaries of the programme mentioned that they have used the cash transfer for petty trading, investing in animal

rearing. These are some positive signals that the programme is making in various communities.

In the developing world, conditional cash transfers were first introduced in a few countries in Latin America and South Asia but are now becoming increasingly widespread. An early, iconic conditional cash transfer scheme, Progresá, in Mexico, began in 1997 with 300,000 households and its successor, Oportunidades, now reaches 5 million households. In Brazil, the Bolsa Família programme began in the mid-1990s as an experiment in two municipalities and currently covers 11 million families. In Colombia, the initial target of the Familias programme had been 400,000 families, but it had expanded to cover 1.5 million households by 2007. Smaller programmes in poorer countries such as Kenya and Bangladesh cover a few thousand families (World Bank, 2009).

### **Poverty situation in the Upper West region**

The Upper West Region is the last region to be created in Ghana. The region became an off shoot of the Upper East region and officially got its regional status in 1983 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010). The region shares boundaries with Burkina Faso to the north, the Upper East to the east, to the south the Northern Region and Côte d'Ivoire to the west. The region covers a geographical area of 18,476 square kilometres, which is about 12.7% of the total land area of Ghana (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010). The region is located in the Guinea Savannah belt. Among the trees commonly found in this region are shea, baobab, dawadawa and neem, which are able to withstand drought. These trees provide fuel for domestic use as well as wood for the construction of houses.

The region's climate is common with the three northern regions in Ghana. It has a single rainy season from April to September, with average annual rainfall of about 115 cm. This is followed by harmattan, a prolonged dry season

characterized by cold and hazy weather from early November to March, and an intense hot weather that ends only with the onset of early rainfall in April. The mean monthly temperature ranges between 21°C and 32°C. Temperatures rise to their maximum (40c) in March, just before the onset of the rainy season, and fall to their minimum (20c) in December during harmattan which is brought about by the north-east trade winds.

The major economic activities of the people in the region are farming, trading etc. The population depends largely on rainfall to cultivate crops like guinea corn, maize, millet, rice, soya beans, groundnuts, cotton, yam, cowpea, and sorghum. The people are also engaged in spinning, weaving and smock designing. They produce musical instruments such as the xylophone and are involved in pottery, blacksmithing and carving. Tourist attractions in the region include the Wa Na's Palace and Dondoli Sudamic (Larabanga) Mosque, the Jirapa Na's Palace, the all-stone Gothic art church in Nandom and the hippopotamus sanctuary at Wechiau. Other attractions are the Gwollu Slave Defence Wall and slave site caves as well as George Ekem Ferguson's tomb (Ghana Statistical Services, 2010). The basic characteristics of the region demonstrate a region that is poor. The region was ranked as the second poorest region in Ghana only after central region (Canagarajah and Pörtner, 2003).

Statistically, the Upper West Region is one of the poorest regions in the country (GLSS, 2010). It lags behind other regions in terms of development especially in education, health and infrastructure. The incidence of poverty was 88.4% in 1991/1992 against the national average of 51.7% and 84.0% in 1998/1999 against the national average of 39.5% and 87.9% in 2005/2006 against the national average of 28.5% (Ghana statistical Service, 2007). This trend of poverty is an indication that majority of the people in the region are poor and this also show that the depth of

poverty which has risen from 46.7% in 1991/1992 to 54.6% in 2005/2006 is equally high. Again about 82.5% of the Upper West Region is rural and the statistical service put the percentage at 100 in 2010 (Fobih, Koomson, & Akyeampong, 1999; Ghana statistical service, 2010). According to the GLSS three and four poverty is still widespread in the region, with 84 per cent of the population below the poverty line and 68 per cent extremely poor. These figures throw in to light the need for drastic efforts to be made at poverty reduction in the region. Hence the introduction of LEAP came at the right time as it could help reduce the poverty levels in the region particularly extreme poverty.

Evidence from the GLSS three and four, produces a picture that puts the Upper West in an unstable

position when discussing poverty. For instance in rural households, which accounted for 90 per cent of the households in 1991/92 GLSS and 83 per cent in 1998/99 GLSS, the incidence of poverty and extreme poverty increased significantly. Almost 95 per cent of all rural households were poor in 1998/99, up from 89 per cent in 1991/92. The picture is even worse when one looks at extreme poverty in the rural area, where it has increase almost 13 percentage points, from 74.3 to 87.1 per cent, between the two surveys. All the major groups, rural household, male-headed households and food crop producers, have experienced increased poverty between the two surveys. Table 2 below shows the poverty of the country and the Upper West Region.

**Table 2: Trends in Poverty in Ghana by Region, 1992 - 2006**

<b>Region</b>	<b>1991/1992</b>	<b>1998/1999</b>	<b>2005/2006</b>
Greater Accra	26	5	12
Western	60	27	8
Ashanti	41	28	20
Eastern	48	44	15
Central	44	48	20
Volta	57	38	37
<b>Upper West</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>88</b>
Upper East	67	88	70
Northern	63	69	52
Brong Ahafo	65	36	29
<b>National</b>	<b>51.7</b>	<b>39.5</b>	<b>28.5</b>

Source: Ghana Statistical Service, 2006

The trend for the Upper West region calls for pragmatic interventions such as LEAP to stem the situation. The Upper West has witnessed increased poverty rates since 1991 with only marginal declines. This further throws into light how effective intervention programmes have been for the region. The LEAP programme is apt as it targets the extreme poor or the bottom 20 percent of the people in the country and the region in

particular. Efforts at poverty reduction should be pursued and should be long term if this trend is to be reverse completely.

### **Challenges with Cash Transfer programmes**

The comprehensive implementations of development programmes such as poverty reduction programmes come with their associated challenges. These challenges are country specific

as well as context dependent. This literature review identifies particular challenges with development intervention in general and specifically poverty reduction programmes across the continent and the world over. This is aimed at distilling the challenges associated with poverty reduction in developing countries.

In a recent study by Agbaam and Dinbabo (2014) on the impact of the LEAP in Ghana the study uncovered that the insufficient nature of the cash transfer, irregular payment periods, lack of access to complimentary services and limited staff capacity pose serious challenges to the programme. These challenges stated in the research do not only need to be highlighted but to be thoroughly investigated. Agbaam and Dinbabo study mentions these only as challenges however their research concentrated on the impact of the programme on poverty reduction at the household level.

The International Labour Organisation (2013) equally recognizes that cash transfer amounts however tend to be insufficient to enable women to leave poverty in large numbers, nor are they adequate to offset recent increases in women's poverty rates relative to men's. The impact of cash transfer on women as observed by the ILO is significant and therefore put into the discussion that cash transfers may be evenly targeted at both men and women. The adequacy of such cash transfers would continue to be a debate since amount of money also depend on the availability of other assets such material and human capital. Aside the challenges relative to the individual some challenges recognized by Harvard Kennedy School in 2012 includes supply constraints, poor infrastructure, and quality control issues. Also significant are barriers to making educational and health services available to meet the conditions set forth by cash transfers is a challenges in Least Developed Countries. The study also mentioned that in Low-income African countries

administrative resources to implement large-scale cash transfer schemes are inadequate and in some instance unavailable. As a result of these bottlenecks, cash transfers in Africa have typically focused on food insecurity rather than human capital development.

In the view of Pikos (2012) he thinks that poverty reduction strategies increase bureaucracy and also result in the misapplication of funds. In a comprehensive evaluation study on the impact of LEAP in Ghana by Handa et al (2013) the study revealed that implementation of LEAP has been inconsistent. For instance for the 24- month evaluation period of the study households received only 20 months' worth of payments. This was followed by a long gap in cash payments to households in 2011, followed by a triple payment in February 2012 to settle arrears. Thus, LEAP households did not receive a steady flow of predictable cash with which to smooth their consumption. The study further revealed that for the 24 month of the evaluation there was no impact on consumption possible due to the gaps in payments.

In a another research conducted by Park and Handa (2012) on the operations of LEAP in Ghana the study found that over 95 percent of households felt that how they received information regarding payment was appropriate. The figures indicated that 43 percent of the households received information from a community leader and 14 percent received information from a Local Organizing Committee (LOC) member. Seventy-six percent of households were informed publicly of their payment, while 24 percent were told in private. This shows that the mode of giving information to beneficiaries about payment dates is not conducive to beneficiaries and there some beneficiaries can miss payment or may be dubbed. This raises further questions on the challenges of the programme in general.



## **Theoretical Perspective**

The theoretical approach that underpins this study is the basic needs approach. This approach emerged in the 1970s as a reaction to the emphasis on economic growth and other macro economic development policies which have predominated since the end of the Second World War. The approach came out of a series of statements that sought to restate the overarching need for a refocus in development with attention on the basic needs. For instance in the Cocoyoc Declaration (1974) a statement issued by a group of natural and social scientists at the end of a United Nations seminar on patterns of resource use, environment, and development strategy was concerned with reorienting development towards people.

In another statement issued in 1975 by a group of individuals on the initiative of the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation stressed that political and psychological as well as physical needs are important in development. These statements crystallised into the basic needs approach. The approach opines that basic needs include a list of those things which are required by human beings for bare survival, eg food, shelter, and clothing. It further argued that political and psychological as well as physical needs are also important in development. It emphasizes that human needs are not only physical but also psychological, not absolute but relative to what is enjoyed by other people in society (International Labour Organisation, 1976; International Labour Organisation, 1977; D.P. Ghai et al, 1977).

This theory fits into this paper because the issue of basic needs have been the discussion of most governments in the developing world in recent times. The provision of basic needs has been the concentration of most governments and these mostly include provision of health education, food, and affordable housing. The provision of these needs has a major aim of reducing poverty.

The Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty programme which is targeted at the poor provides basic needs for the bare survival of the extreme poor. The extreme poor in Ghana constitute 20 percent of the people below the poverty line (Ghana statistical service, 2010). Therefore basic needs for survival such as food, education and health were taught crucial to these people and therefore a cash grant is given to these people to enable them acquire food and as well as access free health and send their children or close dependents to school. This draws from the intention of the basic needs approach which argues that development must focus on the provision of basic needs for people and giving people psychological and physical freedom to live a decent live comparable to lives in other societies.

## **Data and Methods**

Data for this research was obtained from two sources primary and secondary. The primary data mainly constituted in-depth interviews with all programme officers of LEAP in the Upper West Region. The secondary data include the 2010 population and housing census, government publications on the LEAP programme, district statistics on the LEAP as well as relevant publications on LEAP in Ghana. There are a total of eleven districts in the Upper West Region and these include Wa Municipality, Wa West district, Wa east district, Sissala East, Sissala West, Nadowli district, Jirapa district, Goulu district, Lambusie/Kaani district, Lawra district and Nandom district. Every district in the region has a LEAP programme's officer who is also the district officer for the Social Welfare Department. The study henceforth targeted all LEAP programme officers in the region. These officers were selected purposively for this study. This is because they are directly involved in the implementation of LEAP

and can have in-depth knowledge of the challenges of the programme. They are also the main focal persons of LEAP in the region. The programme officers are constantly in touch with beneficiaries and also carry out house to house visits to monitor and evaluate the running and usage of funds among beneficiaries. The officers also keep records of beneficiaries and document as well as intervene to tackle some challenges that beneficiaries face. Therefore the choice to targeted and select these people was to enable the researchers have in-depth explanations of the challenges that the programme faces from the perspectives of these officers.

A key informant was used to contact the rest of the respondents. The key informant who is also a programme officer for one of the district's provided the researcher with names and contact numbers of all programme officers in the region. These programme officers were first contacted for their consent and interview dates scheduled. Permission was also sought from respondents to record the interviews. Interviews were however conducted on telephone. The researcher was guided by an interview schedule and on the average each interview lasted for 25minutes. Even though telephone interviews have their own weaknesses such as inability to observe behaviour, interruptions in the interview process, network challenges and also inability to have face to face interaction, the researcher created a congenial, friendly telephone interviews environment with respondents who willingly expressed profound knowledge on the subject been discussed. All nine respondents participated in the study. They were nine respondents representing the total of eleven districts in the region because it was realized that some new districts did not have programme officers so the programme officers of their mother districts from which they were created still acted as the programme officers for these new districts. For instance Nandom district is still run by the district

officer for Lawra and the Lambusie/Karni district is also still run by the Nadowli district officer. Interviews were recorded with the mobile phone and these were played back later for transcription and analysis. This method was chosen because it reduced the time the researcher had would have spent going to the field and was also cost effective. The response rate was equally high because consent was sought before interviews were conducted.

## **Results**

### **Administrative challenges**

A vital objective of this research was to investigate challenges that have beleaguered the LEAP programme in the Upper West region. These challenges were broadly grouped into administrative or officers related challenges, beneficiary related challenges and political challenges. The first major challenge tackled in the interviews was officer related or administrative challenges.

A major issue revealed was the unavailability of official means of transportation for programme officers. The programme officers complained they do not have official means of transportation to go round their districts. The interviews unearthed that the duties of the programme officers were varied and numerous. Programme officers were in-charge of mobilising beneficiaries for payments, they also organise beneficiary fora in the communities, it is also their duty to do house to house visits to monitor the actual usage of the money. All these duties involve extensive travels and therefore demands that programme officers have reliable means of transport to enable them carry out these duties. What makes their situation particularly difficult is that during payment they are supposed to transport the official of the Ghana Post in-charge of the payment to the pay points. However, due to unavailability of official means of transport they are compelled to use their own

means of transport which adds to their cost of running the programme. Most of them admitted that they use their own means of transport and with that they still have problems maintaining and providing fuel for the motorbikes that they mostly use. The unavailability of official means of transport to most of these officers is further echoed by one programmes officer.

*The issue of transportation is serious. Take me for instance a district programme officer but I do not have a means of transport. When I want to go round the district I have to use my own motor bike and sometimes providing fuel is a problem. The LEAP management unit has not given me any means of transport. This makes the work tedious. But we do not want to complain because we are helping our people (LEAP programme officer A).*

The unavailability of means of transport makes the implementation of the programme difficult since programme officers do not have the necessary logistics to work with and ensure that the program run smoothly. The catchment areas of the programme as revealed from the interviews were basically rural areas. These rural areas were mostly characterized by bad roads. This makes movement difficult. Sometime the use of vehicles is impossible due to the nature of the roads. Therefore the most conducive means of transport are motorbikes which are easily navigable and can travel through many villages within a day. However the unavailability of such means of transport do not only hamper the programme but de-motivate these programme officers since they see the job as rather cost to them. This situation is further compounded by the fact that other stakeholders who could support the programme by providing such facilities like logistics in terms of transport are not doing so. The words of one programme officer summarises this point.

*Transportation is a big problem to us here, even though we have a motorbike, to fuel it is a problem*

*and the LEAP mobilization money which they give to us is just inadequate. But that money is supposed to maintain the motorbike, buy fuel and pay the community LEAP implementation committee members. We do not also get regular support from other institutions like the district assembly. This is the situation here (LEAP programme officer, B).*

The issue of transportation runs through most of the officers interviewed. This underscores the desire and need for official means of transportation to be provided to these programme officers if the programme is to achieve the desired result. The unavailability of official means of transport is further indicated by another programme officer. In his narration he admitted that

*The number one challenge we have here is the means of Transport to go round the district. Any time I have to go round the district I have to borrow a motorbike somewhere and fuel it myself to be able to do the work. It delays a lot of things (LEAP programme officer C).*

The issue of transportation as a challenge cannot be glossed over as many programme officers have difficulty performing their duties as LEAP officers due to the unavailability of official means of transportation for them. Similar challenges were raised by Agbaam and Dinbabo (2014) on the impact of the LEAP in Ghana. Their study uncovered that the insufficient nature of the cash transfer, irregular payment periods, inadequate means of transport, lack of access to complimentary services and limited staff capacity pose serious challenges to the programme. Also the observation by Harvard Kennedy School in 2012 that in Low-income African countries administrative resources to implement large-scale cash transfer schemes are inadequate and in some instance unavailable holds in the case of the Upper West region. Such constraints as mentioned by the

study include supply constraints, poor infrastructure, and quality control issues.

Besides the unavailability of transportation the interviews also revealed that difficulty eliminating deceased beneficiaries and swapping of beneficiary's names and pictures were a challenge to programme officers. The LEAP programme prescribes that when a beneficiary dies and that beneficiary is one in a household then the payment for such a beneficiary should be terminated. On the other hand if there is more than one beneficiary in the household then replacement is done. These two scenarios all pose challenges to programme officers because in the case where replacement is done some people in some households may present false identities whom by definition are not extremely poor and therefore not covered by LEAP so such a household can continue to enjoy the cash benefits. Even in the case of the deceased persons the household may refuse to report such cases to the programme officers and rather present a carer who still takes the cash grants on behalf of the deceased. Lamenting this situation a programme officer narrates:

*In cases where there are deceased persons or beneficiaries and the community fails to report this to the programme officer, such households simply ask other persons to come for the money (LEAP programme officer C).*

Also in the view of another programme officer:

*There are many instance where if you as the programme officer is not smart to detect a deceased person or beneficiary the house simple just ask somebody who is bold enough and can convince people to come and take the money. So as the prograame officer we are always smart in conjunction with our Community LEAP Implementation Committee members (LEAP Programme officer D)*

Such cases thwart the efforts of the programme and make the work of the programme officers difficult. This also demands vigilance and proper monitoring and supervision of beneficiaries. Furthermore the programme officers equally complained of several cases where beneficiaries' names and pictures have been swapped and since the database is not disaggregated by community it makes it difficult for programme officers to assess the genuineness of some beneficiaries. In most of the cases the name of one beneficiary may be replaced with another beneficiary in a different community and this makes verification of beneficiaries difficult. Again a programme officer shared a concern. He narrated:

*In my District there are instances where people have their pictures swapped with other people from different communities and during payment the Paymaster who is the Ghana post official refused to pay beneficiaries whose pictures have been swapped arguing that they are not the real people. This creates a real challenge for us (LEAP programme officer, E).*

In addition the other aspect that poses challenge to officers most is when deceased beneficiaries have been identified and names forwarded to the national headquarters for termination and it takes too long to be effected this creates problems of accountability for them. This view was expressed by some of the programme officers. For instance one programme officer indicated:

*We have difficulties eliminating deceased beneficiaries from our lists. Apart from the households who express misgivings when we inform them that due to the death of a beneficiary the name has been deleted it actually takes too long for such names to be deleted. For instance I submitted some names since 2012 and these names have still not been deleted. This poses challenges for me as it is difficult to explain the*

*reasons behind that (LEAP Programme officer, D).*

Similar sentiments were expressed by other programme officers for instance in the narration of one officer he stated that

*I submitted some names for deletion over a year ago and these names have still not been deleted. But these have been accounted for. This is not helping, the system should be relooked at and so these can be done at the district level. It even breeds bad blood between us and some beneficiaries (LEAP Programme officer, E).*

The swapping of pictures as can be inferred from the interviews further affects beneficiaries in their access to complementary services. Since as part of the LEAP conditionality beneficiaries are entitled to free National Health Insurance utilization. They are usually registered using the data provided by the district programme officers of LEAP and once names and pictures change NHIS officials feel reluctant to register such people on the reason of falsification or impersonation and these also creates problems for the programme officers as they have to proof the veracity of such beneficiaries.

In addition to the unavailability of official means of transport and the difficulty eliminating deceased beneficiaries, the interviews revealed that the financial support that the LEAP programme gives to these programme officers was inadequate. Cash transfer programmes are not suppose to be profit oriented and for these programme officers it is not a form of payment to them. However, as part of this administrative running cost programme officers are given some amount of money to enable them organise and mobilise people. This amount is termed by the programme officers as “mobilisation”. The complaint however is that this mobilization is inadequate as it is unable to suffice the basic function of running the programme

administratively. They intimated that these monies are supposed to be used to maintain offices by providing office materials such as stationary amount others, they also rely on that money to buy fuel and to maintain their motorbikes, additionally some amount of that money is used to pay the community LEAP implementation committee members whose number ranges from two to five members in each beneficiary community as a means of motivating them to disseminate information. This obviously makes the money inadequate for them and this can over the long run de-motivates them in carrying out their duties as programme officers. Below are some concerns expressed by programme officers as regards the insufficient nature of this money.

*They give us some token that is the mobilization and this money is shared with the Community LEAP Implementation Committee members and after giving them something, there is nothing left for me as an officer. That money is just inadequate even for the CLIC members (LEAP Programme officer, D).*

*The issue of inadequate motivation is very true when is time for LEAP there is something they call mobilization. They give us some money to share with our CLIC members and in every community there is a minimum of two and a maximum of five CLIC members. After giving them something to also buy fuel or phone credit I have virtually nothing left. Honestly that money is woefully inadequate (LEAP Programme officer, B).*

Besides these major challenges that confront these programme officers in their quest to deliver on the LEAP programme other auxiliary issues which they acknowledged they were able to manage at their level include issues such as misunderstanding among household members when there is a replacement of beneficiary, difficulties mobilizing beneficiaries, suspicion of

the use of money, misinformation and pressure from beneficiaries.

### **Challenges faced by beneficiaries**

The research equally explored challenges related to only beneficiaries. From the perspectives of programme officers the researcher found out the specific challenges that beneficiaries faced. The interviews therefore revealed that a major challenge that beneficiaries faced is the delay in the payment of monies. Some researches have revealed the issue of delay in payments as a major challenge facing cash transfer programmes all over the world. For instance in the FAO (2013) on the impact of LEAP in Ghana it was recognized that LEAP payments were irregular and infrequent and therefore made it difficult to smooth consumption and plan investments and expenditures within families and in communities.

Also Agbaam and Dinbabo (2014) study on the impact of the LEAP in Ghana which uncovered that the insufficient nature of the cash transfer, irregular payment periods, inadequate means of transport, lack of access to complimentary services and limited staff capacity pose serious challenges to the programme adds to the empirical evidence that delays in payments of LEAP grants still exist. Therefore the results of this study further confirm the persistence and existence of this challenge. Most of the programme officers interviewed in this study confirmed that beneficiaries constantly complain of the delay in payments and persistently call them (programme officers) to make enquiries. This give the indication that beneficiaries need more regular payments and further shows those monies may be inadequate that they are not able to sustain beneficiaries for the two months payment periods. According to a programme officer he narrated that

*The issue of delay of money or fund is a real challenge for instance there are instances where the money delayed for between 8-11 months and*

*when the money was released it was just for two months. During this period, the beneficiaries kept calling wanting to find out why funds have delayed and for some asking whether the programme has been scrapped off (LEAP Programme officer, E).*

This just re-echoes the earlier evidences presented that, delays in the release of funds poses problems for both beneficiaries and programme officers. This goes to question the sources of funds to support poverty alleviation programmes such as this. Where funds are donor dependent then such delays would be expected and again even if funds are generated from internal sources the regularity and effectiveness of it must be ascertained before embarking on such cash transfer programmes. In the case of Ghana funds come from government budgets and from donor sources and therefore delays may come from these two sources given that the country is experiencing fiscal deficit and the currency is equally not stable coupled with the external financial crisis delays in releasing such funds one could say is expected. However, for the programme to succeed and for people to jump out from the extreme poverty bracket to another level then regular flow of funds is necessary. The delay of funds is further lamented in the interview with a programme officer for LEAP when the question was asked as to what kinds of challenges he faces. He explained:

*The challenges are numerous, first any time there are delays in payment, people give a hell of pressure, they keeping calling and asking. Some households would even demand form money from you. So the delays don't help at all (LEAP Programme officer, A).*

Similar views have expressed by other programme officers in the region. For instance another programme officer also narrated the following when the question of delays in payment was posed.

*That issue of irregular payments is very true, the LEAP is designed that every two months monies are paid to beneficiaries, but that is not always the case there are instances where payments have been delayed up to 4 or 6 months in my district. So they have been complaining but we just explain to them that it would come (LEAP Programme officer, B).*

Literature reviewed earlier alludes to the persistence of such irregular nature of payments for beneficiaries of LEAP. For instance Handa et al (2013) study revealed that implementation of LEAP has been inconsistent. For instance for the 24- month evaluation period of the study households received only 20 months' worth of payments. This was followed by a long gap in cash payments to households in 2011, followed by a triple payment in February 2012 to settle arrears. Thus, LEAP households did not receive a steady flow of predictable cash with which to smooth their consumption. The study further revealed that for the 24 month of the evaluation there was no impact on consumption possible due to the gaps in payments.

Probing further in the interviews also revealed that beneficiaries were also having difficulties accessing the complementary services that they were entitled to particularly the national health insurance scheme. Programme officers explained that due to the level of illiteracy among beneficiaries they easily misplace their identity cards which entitle them to access health. Therefore any time they intend to visit a health facility it becomes difficult since they do not have identification cards. Couple with the identity cards is also an issue of transportation. Beneficiaries were equally unable to access health services because they cannot afford the cost of transport to health facilities especially for those who live far away from health facilities. Therefore even though they are entitled to free medical care under the National Health Insurance Scheme the

unavailability and the cost of transportation prevent and limit them to access such services. Some views were expressed by programme officers on this matter.

*We have got some instances where people names and pictures have been swapped and this gives us a challenge where beneficiaries are to access NHIS. Because the names differ it is difficult for health staff to identify these beneficiaries hence denying them of health services (LEAP programme officer E).*

Similar experiences were raised by another programme officer. He indicated that

*A major challenge they face is when it is time for the renewal of their NHIS cards beneficiaries have to come to the NHIS office in Wa town to do it and how to transport themselves to town is a real problem .Sometimes the availability to transport is a problem and some also the cost (LEAP programme officer A).*

Other districts have complained of the inadequacy of complementary services which include the inadequate health facilities and basic schools. In their explanations accesses to complementary services were either too remote or unavailable to beneficiaries. That also implies that such districts were deprived and therefore lack the basic amenities such as health facilities and schools. This poses real problems for the officers of the LEAP programme.

### **Political challenges**

The third issue explored in the interviews was the issue of political influences in the running of LEAP. The researcher asked programme officers whether in the running of the programme they have experienced political influence or pressure from the political authority in the district. Some district officers maintained they were not under influence or pressure from any political authority.

Whiles other districts complained of political interference. They complained that politician in the district attempt to use the programme to their advantage. They also try to influence the selection of communities to favour their political interests. This poses problems for the programme as this can result in the poor targeting of beneficiaries. In the words of one programme he narrated that

*As for the political inference we do not want to complain for instance some political authorities would persuade me to postpone payment so they can inform the people. But they are using it to their advantage. Particularly now that it district or constituency election they constantly call on me asking me when we will be making payments so they take advantage politically. This is a big challenge but we are managing them (LEAP programme officer, B).*

## **Conclusion**

The evidence revealed in this paper on LEAP suggest that the programme is helping poor people in the region as it has improved their food intake, health status and also helped them educate their children ( Hand et al, 2013; ILO,2013; Agbaam & Dinbabo, 2014; FAO, 2013). This implies that the programme has positive benefits for the people and should be maintained. However to make the programme more beneficial the challenges that programme officers are saddled with should be addressed proactively. These challenges are largely administrative, and beneficiaries related as revealed from the interviews. It can also be concluded that the inability of beneficiaries to move out of the extreme poverty zone after benefiting from the programme since its inception in 2008 suggest that the time period of three years given to beneficiaries to exit is too short and should be relooked at. Poverty reduction is a long term process that needs concerted efforts and includes other needs and not just the provision of cash grants. It can further be concluded that there

is an over centralization of funds for the programme. Funds for LEAP beneficiaries come from the national office to the district levels and therefore any delays from the top equally affect the timely and prompt disbursement of funds. Much as it is appreciated that sources of funds to run the programme come from government budget and donor countries efforts should be made to make such funds regular and sustainable by identifying options of investment and collaborations that can guarantee regular funds flow. This would help to decentralize the funds to the districts which would make it easy to access.

A further conclusion that can be drawn from this paper is that the subtle political interference with the implementation of LEAP should be nipped in the bud. The attempt by politicians in some districts in the region to use the programme to gain political advantage should also be stopped. The success of LEAP depends on the good efforts of programme officers and therefore they should be allowed to freely perform their duties without fear or coercion from political authority.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were drawn from the discussions and conclusions presented above and therefore deserve policy attention. First there is the need to improve administrative resources for LEAP. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection the umbrella ministry under which LEAP is implemented should argue the administrative resources of district officers of LEAP. This would help with the efficient and effective administration of the programme. Other stakeholders such as the district assemblies of various districts should also support LEAP in similar areas of need.

Secondly, a dire concern for the programme to achieve desired results is to decentralize the



activities of LEAP. Apart from the financial decentralization other aspect of LEAP such as data management and performance appraisals should be decentralize to enable for prompt response to some challenges and close supervision from the district level.

Thirdly, it is also recommended that the aspect of complementary services be expanded to cover other areas that can enhance the capacity of beneficiaries. Access to loans and credits as well as some mentoring can be given to beneficiaries who have demonstrated ability of success by creating jobs and employment under the LEAP.

Fourthly, the depoliticisation of the activities of LEAP is also crucial to the success of the programme. The situation where some politicians attempt to use the LEAP for their political ends should be stopped. Poverty reduction should be seen as a national call and agenda and therefore programme and projects aimed at poverty reduction should be devoid of politics so that such programmes can inure to the benefit of the poor.

Fifthly, beneficiaries should be given some form Non-formal education. This can help manage funds better and also offer the opportunity to learn other relevant issues that can help leap out of the extreme poverty zone. This can be done through the non-formal education division of the Ghana education service where beneficiaries can be identified and regularly taken through some form of education basic issues of health, education and management as this can improve their ability to use the funds judiciously.

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