

Evaluating the Impact of Social Protection Programs on Beneficiaries: The Case of Ghana

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Abstract

The concept and practice of social protection has gained prominence over the last decade in developing countries. This rise to prominence has led to growing consensus around the globe that social protection constitutes an effective response to the issues of poverty, deprivation, risk and vulnerability in developing countries, and serves as a *condicio sine qua non* component of economic and social development strategies. It is against this backdrop that policy design and implementation of social protection programs have equally become significant in the discourse of development. This paper situates social protection in the Ghana context as constituting an effective response to the issue of poverty and vulnerability. It examines social protection interventions that have been designed and implemented in Ghana, and the impacts they have accrued towards poverty alleviation. The qualitative multiple case study approach was adopted to explore the impact of the various social protection programs (NHIS, LEAP, SFP, NYEP, and Capitation grant) on their respective beneficiaries. Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews were used to obtain data from selected communities in both Northern and Southern Ghana. In this study, an impact evaluation of social protection programs on beneficiaries in Ghana has been assessed. The study adopted the OECD evaluation criteria in assessing the impact of these programs. We found that the programs designed and implemented are good responses to the issues of poverty, vulnerability, deprivation and risks. What is more, there should be the commitment of all stakeholders to establish social protection mechanisms that will work efficiently for the good of all the people of Ghana.

Keywords: Social Protection, Implementation, Impact evaluation, Poverty alleviation

Introduction

Social protection programs across the globe have wide diversity in terms of the objectives, design, implementation arrangements and target groups. This notwithstanding, they all have a common aim reducing poverty, improving economic conditions and wellbeing and promoting equity and social inclusion (Barrientos et al., 2013; UNICEF, 2012, 2015; Sanfilippo et al., 2012; International Labour Organization (ILO), 2013). To assess the realization of these aims, evaluating these social protection programs are critical.

Evaluation measures are gradually playing critical roles in social protection programs throughout the world. Both government and non-governmental organizations have recognized the need for rigorous evaluation of social programs, as it provides means of justifying public spending and indicate whether funded interventions are achieving their intended objectives or

not (Blomquist, 2003). Evaluation has been seen as a protective tool for assessing the effectiveness of a program (OSECD, 2019). It provides evidence on social protection's core impacts and consequently inform implementers and other stakeholders on how best to sustain the program.

Despite the existing relevance of impact evaluations, the impact of social protection programs remains poorly documented (OECD, 2019). Many policy stakeholders in both developed and developing countries fail to undertake formal evaluations of social protection programs (Blomquist, 2003). Rubio and Subbarao (2001) confirming this in their studies indicated only about 20 percent of sampled social protection programs supported by the World Bank in 1999 had conducted impact evaluations. The reluctance in conducting evaluations of social protection programs have been attributed to the costly nature of the process in relation to the scarce resources available for such programs. Again the presumption that, negative findings from evaluations could potentially damage political careers of implementers is another reason for failure in conduction evaluations (Blomquist, 2003). The OECD (2019), has also attributed this to the complexity of measuring social protection impacts.

After assessing what goes into the design and implementation of Social protection programs in Ghana, the researcher now seeks to find out the impact of these programs on their respective beneficiaries. In this study, an impact evaluation of social protection programs on beneficiaries in Ghana has been assessed. The study adopted the OECD evaluation criteria in assessing the impact of these programs. These criteria were adopted for this study because they provide detailed components for which successful evaluation should undergo.

Relevant Concepts on Impact Evaluation of Social Protection Programs

Impact Evaluation

According to Blomquist (2003), impact evaluation '*...is an assessment of the impacts on participants that can be attributed to direct participation in a program or intervention....*' Per this definition, impact evaluations provide information on whether a program measurably benefits participants and whether changes on participants can be attributed to the program or intervention. The World Bank in 2002 also defined impact evaluation in the context of development as '*systematic identification of the effects on individuals, households, institutions, and the environment caused by a given development activity such as a program or project...*' Blomquist (2003), outlines the following as questions that a typical impact evaluation should answer;

- Does the program or intervention achieve the stated goals?
- Is the program cost effective in relation to other options?
- What are likely reasons why the program is or isn't successful?
- How can the design or implementation be changed to improve performance?

Blomquist (2003), has indicated that a complete impact evaluation has an *analytic element* and a *speculative/Interpretive element*. Whereas the analytical element assesses the program impacts, the speculative/interpretive element examine why the impacts (or lack of them) are what they are and what the resulting program and policy implications may be.

Evaluation Criteria

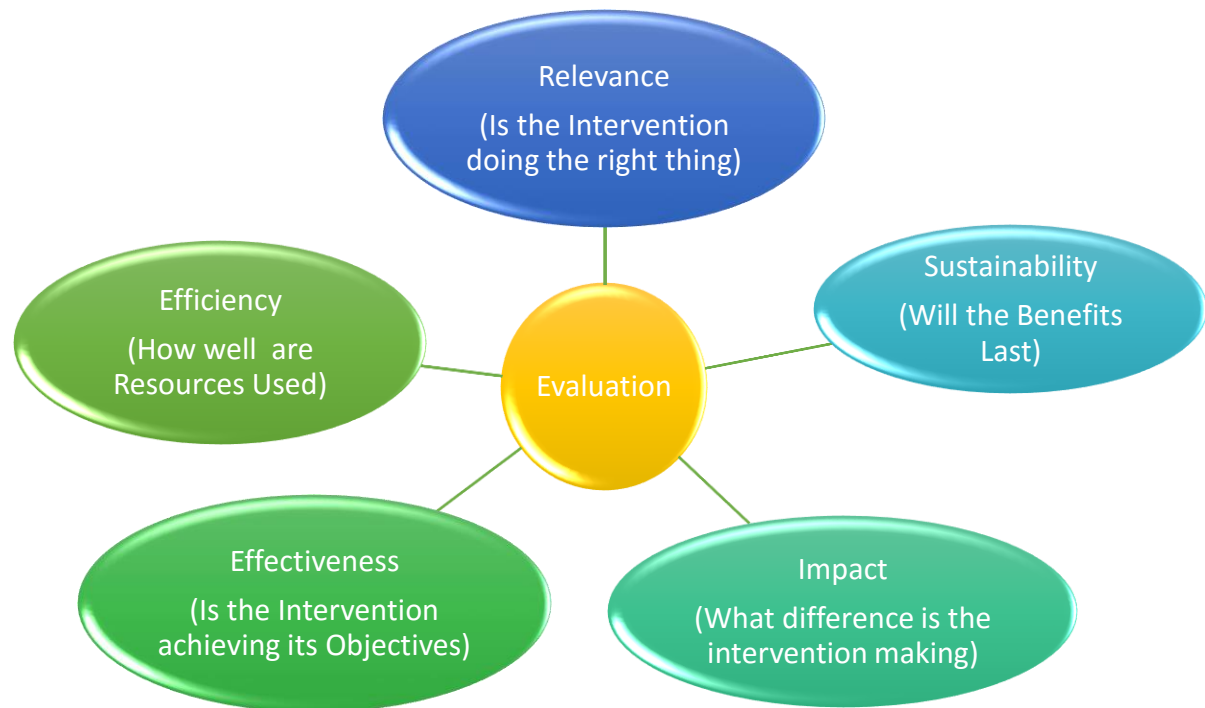
The OECD/DAC (2007) in defining evaluation stated that ‘...It is a systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed project, program or policy on its design, implementation and results...’ In doing such an assessment, they outlined five (5) main criteria that need to be assessed. These have been presented in Table 1

Table 1 Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Criteria	Definition	Relevant Evaluation Question
<i>Relevance</i>	measures the extent to which the program’s objectives are in consistent with beneficiaries’ requirements, the country’s needs as well as the partner’s or donor’s priorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we doing the right things? • What is the relevance or significance of the intervention regarding local and national requirements and priorities? • How important is the intervention for the target group or subgroups?
<i>Effectiveness</i>	assesses how well the program’s result (outputs) contribute to the achievement of the project purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent was the project purpose achieved or is likely to be achieved? • What are the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the project purpose?
<i>Impact</i>	looks at the positive or negative effect or changes produced by the intervention, whether directly or indirectly; intended or unintended.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What real difference has the activity made to the beneficiaries? • How many people been affected? • What has happened as a result of the program
<i>Efficiency</i>	measures how economically resources/inputs, including funds, expertise, time, etc are converted to achieve results. Efficiency will assess if resources have been reasonably used.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the objectives achieved in a cost-efficient manner? • Is the relationship between inputs of resources and results achieved appropriate and justifiable? • To what extent have individual resources been used economically? • Are they any alternatives for achieving the same results with less inputs/funds?
<i>Sustainability</i>	measuring the likelihood of a continuation in the stream of benefits produced by the project after the period of external assistance has ended.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent will activities, results and effects be expected to continue after donor assistance has ended? • How self-supporting is the assisted local counterpart? • What are the major factors which can influence the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the program?

Summaries of these criteria that will ensure effective evaluation exercise have been presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 Evaluation Criteria



Impact of Social Protection

There are some established linkages between social protection and inclusive growth. The OECD (2019) has identified three main channels through which social protections may impact inclusive growth. These channels include; *providing greater security and certainty* that helps households to cope with risks and protect their consumption and assets against adverse shocks. Social protection also *improves households' resources allocation and dynamics* that can affect income growth through means such as investments in education. The third identified channel is that social protection *lift credit constraints and encourage investments* by facilitating access to bank loans and extending credit to low-income households.

Impact at the Individual and Household Levels

Five main possible effects of social protection at the individual and household level have been identified by Mathers and Slater (2014). These include;

- a. Accumulation of Productive Assets;
- b. Preventing the Loss of Productive Capital;
- c. Stimulating Innovation and Entrepreneurship;
- d. Altering Labor Market Participation and Saving; and
- e. Stimulating Investment in Human Capital.

With some social protection programs, low-income households can *accumulate productive assets* through access to credit and thereby supporting investments. Social protections again supplement poor or vulnerable households to cope with shocks. This helps to *prevent the loss of productive capital* after such shocks (Mathers and Slater, 2014). This, for instance helps to reduce the situations where these vulnerable households would have to sell productive assets such as livestock. It also helps to avoid adopting harmful coping mechanisms that have the

potential of deteriorating human capital such as reducing food consumption or preventing children to access education. Another identified effect of social protection is its ability to *enable innovation and entrepreneurship* among beneficiary households. A predictable and long-term income support through social protection could give room for innovation and investments in ventures by beneficiary households which otherwise they could not have afford. Social protection again has direct *impact on labour market participation and savings*. This impact, as recognized by Mathers and Slater (2014) can either be positive or negative, in the sense that, it can lead to better employment opportunities or create dependence, with its adverse consequences. Programs like unemployment benefits could, for instance, increase unemployment durations when beneficiaries wholly depend on them without making any effort to search for better job opportunities. However, this same program could allow individuals to improve their job searches and find better ones that much their skills and aspirations. Depending on the design and type of programs implemented, social protection could either a positive or negative impact on the labor market. In Brazil, for instance, some unconditional and conditional cash transfers as well as some food transfers have facilitated better employment opportunities (ODI, 2011). The free health provision in Mexico, has however created incentives for informality (Alderman and Yemstov, 2014).

Finally, social protection can *stimulate investment in human capital*. Social assistance programs usually come with human capital investments such as assistance in education and health (Barrientos and Scott, 2008). Higher educational attainment, is for instance, closely correlated with future labor market opportunities.

Methodology

The qualitative multiple case study approach was adopted to explore the impact of the various social protection programs (NHIS, LEAP, SFP, NYEP, and Capitation grant) on their respective beneficiaries. In selecting beneficiaries for the study, the entire country was zoned into three (Southern, Middle and Northern Zones). One district was then selected from each of the zones. Selection of the districts was informed by the poverty mapping incidents in these district as given by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS). Districts studied included the East Gonja (Northern Zone); Ekumfi (Southern Zone) and Kwahu Afram Plains (Middle Zone). These districts, according to the GSS are poorest in their respective regions.

As an impact evaluation study, the researcher adopted the ‘*Before*’ and ‘*After*’ approach of evaluation where we assessed the performance of beneficiaries before and after the program. With this approach, the study was able to determine the differences in beneficiaries’ states before and after the interventions and whether these differences were as a result of benefiting from the program or otherwise.

The Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) were used to assess respondents form each of study districts. Each FGD comprised of a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 8 participants and were conducted in a local language that participants will be convenient with. In each of the studied districts, two (2) different FGDs were conducted for each of the Social protection programs. Participants of FGDs in the studied districts have been presented in Table 2 below.

Social Protection Program	Beneficiary Participants
NHIS	Registered NHIS Members
LEAP	Beneficiaries
SFP	Beneficiary Schools
NYEP	Beneficiary Youth
CG	Beneficiary Schools

Aside these FGDs, Key informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with various managers and implementers of the various programs at both the national and district levels.

All interviews will be audio-recorded and data from the interviews will be transcribed and cross-checked to resolve discrepancies. Data will then be analyzed into global themes, organizing themes, and basic themes, with the use of the Nvivo 12 version

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