



ESP II Baseline District Bellwether Findings: Arua and Kiboga Districts

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Acronyms

DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DP	Development Partners
EA	Evaluability Assessment
ESP	Expanding Social Protection
GoU	Government of Uganda
MoGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
MoFPED	Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development,
NSPP	National Social Protection Policy
OWC	Operation Wealth Creation
PMR	Policy-maker Rating
PMU	Programme Management Unit
PS	Permanent Secretary
RCT	Randomised Controlled Trial
SAGE	Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment
SCG	Senior Citizens' Grant
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
YLP	Youth Livelihoods Programme

Executive summary

This report presents the district-level findings of a bellwether baseline assessment of district level attitudes to the Senior Citizens Grant (SCG) and social protection overall in Uganda, as part of the second phase of the donor-funded Expanding Social Protection Programme (ESP).

The district-level research sought specifically to investigate and highlight attitudes to the SCG and the extent to which social protection has become part of district-level discourse. The research was conducted in Kiboga District where the SCG has been provided since 2011, and Arua District where it will be introduced in the coming year, and is currently implemented in neighbouring districts. The research comprised in-depth interviews with 27 purposively selected well-informed and influential community members, drawn from a range of sectors, most of whom were not directly involved in programme implementation.

We found that, with the exception of a former Member of Parliament in Kiboga District, our informants were not familiar with the concept of social protection. Nor were they familiar with the National Social Protection Policy (NSPP), both of which were well known among informants in Kampala. The SCG was not universally known at district level, although there was substantial knowledge among a large number of informants about what it is, its implementation, and the size of the grants given to the recipients. Informants had acquired their knowledge through print and broadcast media, attendance at meetings convened to discuss various aspects of the SCG, and via observation, including when the recipients gathered in public places to collect their money.

There was broad agreement that, despite a few shortcomings, the implementation of the SCG was generally of higher quality than that of other initiatives, not least because there were few reports of corruption and malpractices. Demand for the grant was very high; in Kiboga there were 4,663 grant recipients, but these were perceived to be only a small proportion of those who are eligible. Also, informants perceived that there are many individuals deemed not to qualify under current eligibility criteria but who are 'deserving' because of the dire circumstances they lived in. Those who have been left out would like to be included among the recipients. In Arua, where the grant is not yet implemented, elders are clamouring for it to be implemented and feel discriminated against while their peers in neighbouring districts are receiving the grant.

As in Kampala, within the districts many informants raised the issue of the inadequacy of the amount of money recipients of the SCG receive, with broad agreement that it is too small. Nonetheless, informants also noted that, even small as it is, it is of significant benefit for the recipients whom it enables to solve many welfare-related problems and to improve their quality of life as well as for any dependants they may have.

The discussion about its value goes hand in hand with a discussion about its sustainability. Most informants were of the view that Uganda is too poor to afford the SCG, especially if it were to be rolled out nationally, because deserving potential recipients are simply too many. There is a view, however, that it could become affordable once Uganda starts earning revenue from oil if these resources were directed towards poverty reduction, particularly if the government improved data collection and promoted needs based targeting, which might have the effect of keeping the number of recipients within manageable limits.

There was a widespread perception among informants that the SCG was of political value to both the ruling party and the President and the dominant perspective was that the SCG has been of immense political value in terms of earning them support. However, when explored in more detail informants differentiated between localised political support at an individual level, and support for the party and President where the informants were less certain about the role of the SCG. The SCG's political value to the NRM and the President was raised in relation to the potential negative political consequences of stopping provision in the event that donors pulled out. While some informants believed that this would undermine the political support the party and the President enjoy, others argued that the impact of the SCG is marginal, and that support stems from the government's management of political stability and security, and the associated prevailing peace in the country, rather than individual policy choices. For that reason, the dominant view was that stopping the SCG would not represent a threat to political support.

The findings have established the suitability of the bellwether method as a rapid and easy to implement tool for exploring prevailing perceptions of policy interventions such as the SCG and gaining insights into perspectives among influential community members outside the donor and programme implementation community, which would otherwise not be given voice. As such it is recommended that as planned, the current findings are used as a baseline and the exercise is repeated in the same districts at the end of the ESP II period, in order to establish the impact of programme implementation on perceptions of the SCG and social protection overall.

Introduction

The document sets out the findings of a baseline study, which forms the district level component of the bellwether component of the *Political Will and Support for Social Protection in Uganda* evaluation initiative, along with a companion Policymaker Rating (PMR) exercise, to assess the impact of the second phase of the DFID-funded Expanding Social Protection programme (ESP II) (2016-2020), on attitudes to social protection provision in Uganda over time.

Using the innovative ‘bellwether’ approach, developed by the Harvard Family Research Project in the US in the 2000s, semi-structured interviews were conducted with influential and well informed district level actors (bellwethers), with the aim of understanding attitudes to the Senior Citizens’ Grant (SCG) - also known as SAGE, Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment - which was introduced and financed with support from DFID and Irish Aid, and the extent to which the issue of social protection has entered the district level discourse.

This report provides findings from two districts: Kiboga District, one of the original 15 districts where the senior citizens grant (SCG) has been under implementation since 2011; and Arua District, one of many where the SCG is yet to be implemented, but where it is being implemented in several districts in its neighbourhood (Zombo, Nebbi, Yumbe, and Koboko). The choice of one district where the SCG is being implemented was influenced by the need to know what senior local political leaders (district chairpersons and their deputies, resident district commissioners and their deputies), senior civil servants (Chief Administrative Officers and their deputies) and purposefully selected informed members of the public (local clergy, members of the business community and other prominent opinion leaders and shapers) would have to say about it based on experience, observation, and information about its implementation. The choice of a non-implementing district was in order to establish what the same categories of informants would have to say about the SCG based on what they might have heard about it (from whatever source), and what ideas, expectations and attitudes they might have developed as a result.

Methodology

In both districts in-depth bellwether interviews were conducted with a pre-determined set of informants fitting the criteria described in the introduction. Altogether 27 people were interviewed, 15 in Kiboga and 12 in Arua (see appendix). In introducing the research, informants were told that it was about the national government’s anti-poverty initiatives that were being implemented in their districts or which they remembered being implemented at some point, and what they knew or remembered about them in terms of their objectives, beneficiaries, and the impact they had had. Following the bellwether methodology, the objective was to allow informants to mention the SCG spontaneously to avoid pro-project bias resulting from the interview process, and the issue was explored through a series of open-ended questions. If informants did not mention the SCG they were prompted after a certain point in the interview schedule, and if it turned out that they knew about it, they would then be asked further questions to elicit as much information about what they knew about it as possible. Additional questions were added to the bellwether question schedule adopted for the Kampala level process, in order to explore key issues and assumptions arising from the national level interview responses.

Based on many years of experience conducting district-level research whereby leaders and officials travel constantly or are usually caught up in meetings of different kinds or attending this or that public

event, there was no expectation that specific leaders or officials would be available for interviews when needed. It was therefore important to focus on categories of informants rather than on individuals. Potential informants were approached in different ways. In some cases their telephone numbers were sourced from local contacts and the individuals contacted by phone. In other cases, they were found in their offices, places of work, or even at home and requested for appointments or, where possible, to be interviewed immediately.

In other cases, longstanding or new local contacts were asked to make the necessary introductions and to encourage the individuals concerned to accept to be interviewed. Not everyone who was requested for an interview was interviewed. Some high profile individuals, senior officials especially were difficult to get hold of because of other commitments that usually forced them to reschedule and eventually cancel appointments. A few potential informants, among them Members of Parliament, did not answer phone calls or respond to short text messages. However, no one who was approached and spoken to about the research declined to be interviewed or expressed unease about answering the questions put to them. Nonetheless, as standard practice all the informants were assured of complete confidentiality, even as some expressed willingness to be quoted.

As with the national-level report, the findings are summarised below, albeit under slightly modified headings, that nonetheless allow for easy comparison between national- and district-level findings. A peculiarity of both districts is that, unlike at national level where informants had heard of or knew something about the National Social Protection Policy (NSPP), at district level they were not at all familiar with it. The picture one gets at district level is that the discourse about the NSSP is a Kampala affair, taking place over the heads of district-level leaders and members of the local business and social elite. Instead, some informants had heard about or possessed substantial knowledge about the SCG and its implementation while others knew nothing about it as the proceeding discussion shows.

Findings: Kiboga District

Kiboga SCG Context

Kiboga District is located 120 kilometres northwest of Kampala City. It has a population estimated at 165,100, as of 2012. It is predominantly rural, with roughly 80 per cent of the population dependent on smallholder agriculture for their livelihood. As indicated, Kiboga is one of the 15 pioneer districts where the SCG was piloted, entailing giving 25,000 shillings per month to selected senior citizens aged 65 and above. According to sources in the district's community development department, by February 2017, 4,663 senior citizens were receiving the grant, although "This is not the actual number (of those who are eligible) because many have not been enrolled", an informant pointed out.

Level of knowledge about the Senior Citizens' Grant

All the informants working with the district administration or who in one way or another are involved in local or national politics – elected leaders and public servants - or play an active role in public life – local clergy, entrepreneurs and opinion leaders and shapers - had some information about the senior citizens' grant, known as 'SAGE' (Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment, the name for the wider programme under which the SCG was initially introduced). They had attended different kinds of

meetings such as seminars where discussions about it had been held. Some had also observed beneficiaries receiving their money. Others had learnt of it through print and electronic media.

Beyond specifically the SCG, most informants were not familiar with the broad concept of social protection. Only the Chief Administrative Officer, and a former MP, were familiar with it. During his time in parliament the former MP had been a member of the parliamentary sub-committee on social protection and as a result his knowledge was significantly greater than that of the other informants. The two bank managers interviewed, prominent actors on the economic scene, did not readily know what the SCG was and needed some time and prompting to recall that they had heard of it. Both had learnt of it through media but had no details either of how much each beneficiary received and how often they received it. They were not alone in this; one of the clergymen and the businessman did not know how often beneficiaries were meant to receive their money and how often they actually received it. Only the public servants and local leaders knew all this.

Also, employees at the offices of two international NGOs both of which work with and in local communities, with one of them focusing mainly on children and their wellbeing, had no detailed information about the SCG in terms of both the amounts beneficiaries were meant to receive and how often they were supposed to receive the money. If it is indeed true as was reported by the informants we interviewed for this study that many recipients of the SCG look after young vulnerable orphans and grandchildren whose parents have migrated to urban areas in search of work, and that the SCG is critically important for the welfare of these children, it is odd that employees of an NGO involved in this sector are not familiar with the SCG. The other NGO, whose employee was interviewed, works on agriculture and climate change. Again, some informants reported that some of the recipients of the SCG invest money in agriculture and use some of it to hire labourers to work in their fields. Here, too, it is surprising that employees of an NGO whose focus is agriculture and combatting the effects of climate change are also not familiar with the SCG.

How influential bellwether informants talk and think about the SCG

That the government and President Museveni have reaped political dividends from the introduction of the SCG and the recent widening of its coverage was clear to informants who were well informed about it and its implementation.¹ They believed that the SCG was bound to raise the level of his support where it might have been weak and to further strengthen it where it was already strong. They believed that, once payments of the SCG start in those districts to which it has recently been extended, the same would happen. To some extent these beliefs are down to speculation but do nonetheless mirror findings at national level about the use of the SCG as a political instrument. According to one particularly well-informed informant in Kiboga District, in the early days of the SCG's introduction when he used to attend meetings to discuss its implementation, local-level National Resistance Movement (NRM) leaders would present it as the initiative of the ruling party, thereby exploiting it politically see Box 1. There was, however, no clear indication of the SCG featuring in political campaigns in 2016.

¹ There is probably a good debate to be had here in the light of results coming from projects focusing on whether foreign aid buys political support for incumbent governments – see, for instance: <https://chrisblattman.com/2017/01/04/foreign-aid-buy-votes-bad-governments-study-uganda-shows-opposite/> (accessed: 08.05.2018).. However, this was a study of perceptions and informants believed the SCG had positive spin-offs for the political support the NRM and President Museveni enjoyed.

Box 1: Politicisation of the SCG at District Level

During preparations to launch the pilot phase, which one informant took part in, NRM officials were telling the public that the SCG was a government initiative which it had embarked on for the benefit of the elderly following the successful launch of credit schemes for the benefit of the youth. According to the informant, the officials worked hard to ensure that the SCG was seen as a government initiative for which the NRM and President Museveni deserved credit given it was the government they both led which had championed it. As a result of its presentation as a purely government and NRM initiative, the informant did not know about the involvement of donors in providing the bulk of the financial resources funding the SCG.

Politicisation of the SCG leads us to the hypothetical question regarding the political implications of the SCG being stopped. As has been pointed out elsewhere², although the long-term affordability and sustainability of the SCG is questioned even within higher echelons of the Government of Uganda (see McCord and Golooba-Mutebi, 2018a), it is also true that its piloting since 2011 has created a certain political dynamic that somewhat narrows whatever room for manoeuvre the government may have if it were to consider halting its implementation. Although only a few informants could identify the potential implications of such a step in their own district, some believed that if the SCG were withdrawn, the decision would lead to disaffection among the recipients, some of whom might react by turning against the NRM and voting against the government in future elections.

However, another informant was more nuanced in his assessment of the political risk such a decision would pose for the NRM, President Museveni and the government, giving the SCG less significance in relation to more important and enduring political forces. According to him, the support the NRM and President Museveni enjoy in Kiboga District is not founded on people's expectation of material gain. Rather, it has been built on the relationship that developed between the National Resistance Army, the guerrilla arm of the NRM, which successfully fought the insurgency that brought the latter and its leader, Museveni, to power. Only since the end of that war, he pointed out, have the people of Kiboga been able to live continuously under peaceful conditions free from state-instigated violence for over 30 years. Many people in Kiboga District therefore perceive any threat to the NRM's and President Museveni's hold on power as a threat to the peace and freedom from violence and rights abuses that they enjoy and have enjoyed since the NRM seized power in 1986.

Apparently this accounts for the dismal performance in electoral terms of opposition parties in Kiboga. This view is supported by remarks made earlier by another informant who pointed out that the people of Kiboga "love the bus (the NRM's party symbol) and tell each other simply to board it and travel to wherever it is headed, regardless of whether there is a driver to steer it or not." For these reasons the informant believed that while the recipients of the SCG would be sorely disappointed if implementation was halted, and while they would endure much hardship, they would stick by the NRM and President Museveni "and whoever succeeds him, provided the successor is designated and 'sold' to them by him." The argument that the NRM uses the SCG as a tool to gain political support may therefore apply in some places and not others, although for Members of Parliament, as the national-level research showed, claiming credit for its extension to any district is a potential vote winner, which likely explains why they push for it.

² See the ESPII 2016 Advocacy and Influencing Strategy.

Likelihood of the state extending SCG provision

Discussion of the issue of coverage would start with an exploration of whether informants conceived of the SCG as something the elderly were entitled to or whether they saw it as a favour from the government. The question did not always elicit straight answers. No informant believed firmly that the government was obliged to give money to the elderly. However, those who ventured to answer the question argued that the elderly poor deserve assistance and that the government is well placed to offer it to those who do not have adequate means of sustenance. This argument was based on the reasoning that, while they were young and energetic, the elderly contributed directly and indirectly to building and developing the country.

In addition, there was broad agreement that it would be good if the government extended the SCG's coverage to all the elderly. At the same time there was considerable doubt about the feasibility of such coverage. Discussions about the likelihood of extending coverage inevitably led to discussion about the SCG's sustainability, as was the case with national-level interviews. And so in Kiboga the sustainability question was put to informants against the background of indications that there is high demand from the elderly and their families for extension of coverage. Specifically, informants were asked if it would be sustainable were it to come to be seen as an entitlement to which all the elderly, whichever way they were identified, should have access. Informants generally agreed that Uganda is a poor country, which in its current circumstances could not possibly afford to give money to every elderly person, even if the criterion used was age, such as from 65 and above.

Although this was not part of the bellwether semi-structured interview process, informants were asked what ought to be done to ensure access to the SCG for elderly people who deserve it as an entitlement while also ensuring that this happens on a permanent, sustainable basis, in order to gain insights into their understanding of constraints and feasible political responses to the question of extended coverage. Informants made a number of proposals. One was that the criteria for qualification should be changed to reduce the number of people who qualify for assistance. The specific proposal was that eligibility should be on the basis of age, and that for one to qualify they should be 80 years of age and older or without conceivable alternative sources of assistance. Means-testing and close scrutiny of the personal circumstances of the elderly were also suggested, to ensure that those who may not qualify on the basis of their age but were deserving of assistance also get it. There were also informants who believed that once Uganda starts exporting oil, the revenues should be sufficient to support wider coverage. Even then, the issue of limiting the numbers of the elderly who qualify through careful consideration of eligibility criteria remained important to the informants.

Also, some informants proposed that, for the sustainability question to be answered satisfactorily in a manner that would help lead toward an informed decision for planning purposes, the government would have to improve data collection. Specifically, the number of elderly people in Uganda and their age ranges must be established accurately and the figures updated on a regular basis to help the government plan for programmes such as the SCG. This, according to an informant, has to begin with mandatory registration of every birth and death and improvement in the effectiveness of citizenship registration through the National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA).

Demand for the SCG

Informants emphasised that demand for the SCG in Kiboga is very high and emanates from several sources. First are the elderly who receive it and would like to continue receiving it. Evidence for

demand was provided through reports that the elderly petition their local leaders and local government officials whenever disbursement delays. Delays have been frequent in the last 2 or so years. In some cases they last several months. At the time of interviewing (March 2018), grants had not been paid out since November 2017. Although this raises the tempo of petitioning and sometimes complaints about officials withholding the money for unknown reasons, there are some advantages attached to the delays. One is that the recipients receive their money in lump sum, which enables them to solve problems or challenges that require relatively large financial outlays. They include building new houses or repairing old ones. Others demanding the SCG are the elderly who were not included among the recipients but consider themselves to be just as deserving, some even more so. There are two broad categories of these claimants: those who are 65 years old or older, who are technically eligible but were not included due to coverage constraints; and the under 65 year-olds who are as poor as their older peers or who because of some illness or disability feel that, judged on the basis of need, they would qualify ahead of some of the recipients who have other sources of regular income and who therefore, strictly speaking, do not need the SCG. According to one informant, “they are in worse shape than some recipients who are aged 65 and above.”

Informants illustrated the high level of demand for the SCG by pointing out that, on the day the grants are given out, larger numbers of the elderly turn up than those who are on the list. Those who are not included usually come to try and argue their case with the officials. Other sources of demand include the children or relatives of the elderly who are eligible but who are not on the list of recipients. Others are officials who would like their relatives to be included.

Elected leaders who would benefit from associating themselves with a decision to widen coverage also articulate the need for coverage to be increased, according to informants. Like Members of Parliament at national level, their motivation must stem from wanting to be heard to argue for wider coverage because of its potential to raise one’s political capital. If coverage were to be widened, it would enhance their reputation and electability, given it would have been during their tenure of office that it would have happened.

Effectiveness of ESP communication messages

With the exception of two informants, the bank managers who heard of the SCG through media, possibly in ESP-sponsored adverts or features in newspapers, the rest of the informants who knew about it had learnt of it by virtue of their work or functions. These included elected local leaders and technical officers working for the district administration who plan for, implement and oversee the implementation of various programmes, projects and initiatives. Others were religious leaders whose work includes ministering to the old, ill, infirm and vulnerable, including from their own homes. It was through this interaction with the elderly that they came to learn of the SCG. One of them, however, had in the past attended several meetings during the pilot-planning phase. Other informants knew about it from hearing people talk about it or from seeing large numbers of elderly people gathered in one place to collect their money. It was therefore difficult to judge the effectiveness of ESP’s communication messages or strategy.

The promotion of SP issues in the policy arena

With the exception of the former MP, informants were not familiar with the high-level policy discourse on social protection and the rationale for it that one encounters in Kampala. Therefore informants did not know about the idea of social protection, or the extent to which it was part of the domestic political

discourse. A few knew that donors were involved in financing the initiative, but they were not aware of donor involvement in introducing or promoting the concept and most believed it was a government-led programme. One senior public servant had heard President Museveni addressing a public gathering in Western Uganda, and announcing that the government was planning to give some money to the elderly. He perceived this to be the origin of the SCG, suggesting that it was following that speech that the Ministry of Gender had picked up the idea and turned it into policy, after which parliament endorsed it. As far as he was concerned, this was a classic case of “someone’s idea” becoming policy.

Value of the SCG

National-level interviews showed that there is much debate about the ‘real value’ of the SCG to the recipients. One view among some informants was that it is ‘very little money’, although most argued that the grants are of great value and that they have a marked impact on the lives of the recipients and, for those with dependants, them too. Given the reportedly high demand for the SCG, this issue was explored in the district level interviews.

According to informants who are familiar with life in the villages, and here the religious leaders were most informative, the elderly poor live in conditions of deprivation and misery. One of the clerics summed up part of his observations: “*waliwo wotuuka nolaba nga omukadde wabeera watiisa*” (you can find an elderly person living in scary circumstances). There are many elderly people who either live alone, or with young children who may be orphans of their own deceased children, or those of children who left home to go and look for work elsewhere. Those who left and never found stable work and therefore have no regular income usually do not visit regularly, let alone send money to help with looking after the children they left behind. For those who come back to visit from time to time, few earn enough to leave enough money behind when they return to wherever they work. Elderly people living in these circumstances are seen as deserving the support they get through the SCG.

Not all the informants had information regarding the use to which the recipients of the SCG put it. However, those who were well informed about the circumstances in which some of the recipients live emphasised its value, confirming the dominant view of Kampala informants. The recipients have put the money to multiple uses. They use it to buy essential household items such as sugar, salt and soap and to pay for scholastic materials for their grandchildren and medicines and health care for themselves and the children. This boosts business for local grocers and shopkeepers including dispensary owners, especially on the day they receive the money. Some buy livestock (goats, chickens, pigs), hire labourers to work in their fields, and even repair or modify their houses, including changing their roofs from grass thatching to iron-sheet roofing.

To put into context the ‘real value’ of this seemingly small sum of money, an informant emphasised: “a kilo of salt costs only 500 shillings, but there are people who do not make even 1,000 shillings in a month. Imagine 25,000 shillings in the hands of someone who otherwise would not be able to afford a kilo of salt at 500 shillings!” Although informants agreed that the SCG does not lift people out of poverty, they emphasised that it makes a critical difference in the lives of vulnerable elderly people whose ability to survive through their own efforts or those of their unemployed and also poor children is severely limited. According to another informant, even the elderly whose migrant children send assistance, the money they send is usually just enough to cover essential needs, leaving them nothing extra. Consequently, the SCG enables them to have their own money whose expenditure is entirely in their own hands, which has a positive psychological effect.

Quality of implementation of the SCG

National-level interviews suggested that the implementation of the SCG initiative has been generally free of the problems usually associated with implementation of various initiatives, among them the youth opportunity fund and other anti-poverty initiatives such as the *entandikwa* scheme of the mid-1990s. In Kiboga district, however, the views of informants who are not employed by the government paint a different picture. Several issues were raised. One was about the eligibility to be on the list of recipients. There were claims that some people who were listed in the beginning subsequently ended up not receiving money because they were not on the list, for reasons that were never explained to them.

A member of a parish development committee (PDC), a structure whose members are volunteers that provide various types of logistical support to the district community development department with regard to registering and mobilising recipients, gave, for example, her own parents. Her mother is 76 years old and receives her grant. Her father who is also eligible and whose name was on the list in 2011 before subsequently being told that it was no longer there, for reasons that have never been explained, does not. For a long time he has tried to get an explanation for why his name is no longer on the list, without success. Another case involves a woman whose name also disappeared from the list. A district official told her son who went to look into the matter, that he (the official) could “see her name in the system.” He asked him for 100,000 shillings (£20) to ensure that she starts getting her money. He paid the money but at the time of the research the matter had not been resolved. The same informant cited another case, of a woman who for a long time never received her money despite being on the list. When she eventually received some money, it was only 50,000 shillings (£10). According to the informant, “when she asked for her arrears, X intimidated her into silence.” Also, there are claims that, before they ceased receiving allowances in June 2017, members of PDCs would be coerced into forfeiting part of their money to officials from the district community development department. The officials who are involved were named.

Complaints were also raised about delayed disbursements, with delays lasting several months in recent times. In addition there was the issue of recipients being made to travel long distances from their places of abode to grant collection points. According to some informants, some recipients spend substantial amounts of their grants on transport, while others who because of their physical frailty should ideally not move about too much, have to be carried by relatives to collection points where they spend several hours waiting to be paid, sometimes in sweltering heat.

What the government should be concerned about if the SCG is implemented nationally

As already shown, informants were concerned that the Government of Uganda did not have the fiscal capacity to implement the SCG nationally on a sustainable basis, arguing that it could only be sustainably implemented if eligibility criteria were adjusted to ensure that the number of recipients remains small and affordable. The concern was also raised that significant data gaps, with for example, births and deaths not being recorded systematically, would mean that, if age were the key criterion used, it would be difficult to know where potential beneficiaries were as old as they would claim to be. Addressing weaknesses in data collection was therefore something some informants cited as crucial in enabling the government to ensure recipient numbers remain manageable, and that the SCG goes to the right people who would fulfil the established criteria.

Corruption was another issue informants felt the government should be concerned about. As already indicated by informants, there are signs of it already, even as the SCG covers only a few districts and only a small proportion of eligible persons. For this reason they felt that, were the SCG to be rolled out, the sheer number of districts and that of recipients in each would render ensuring integrity in implementation far more difficult than is currently the case. Indeed, informants believed that if eligibility criteria were to limit the number of recipients, it would raise the risk of corruption because it would open the way for them to be subverted in order for people who do not fulfil them to be included.

Findings: Arua District

Arua SCG Context

Arua District is in the West Nile Region. Its capital, Arua, is located 425 kilometres Northwest of Kampala. As with Kiboga, the main source of livelihood for most of the district's inhabitants is small-scale agriculture, mainly of the subsistence type. Arua town is also a significant trading hub. Given its proximity to the borders of Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan, some of the locals derive their livelihoods from cross-border trade.³ The district population is estimated at 782,077.⁴

Level of knowledge about the SCG

According to the District Council Chairman, "people are crying that Arua has been left out. The opposition are saying this is because of weak district leadership. It became an issue during the presidential campaigns (in 2016) but Museveni assured the public that it will come slowly. During the campaigns for the district chairmanship, again the matter came up. My rivals were telling people that I am not lobbying for the money." And even after Museveni's assurances, the elderly have not stopped asking questions: "They are asking why their counterparts in neighbouring districts are getting the money while they are neglected. They hear on the radio when elders in other districts are being called to go for their money. Even when I am invited to a radio station to speak about something else, they ask about the money."

Even the Community Development Officer (CDO) has come under pressure: "My office has come under attack from the elders. When Museveni seized power, some people here put up resistance when the government told them to lay down their arms. Elders were instrumental in the pacification of the region. Now they hear that elders in other districts are receiving money. They are very bitter about being ignored." These complaints and demands, according to another informant, are the reasons Museveni has been forced to extend the SCG to Arua soon. According to several informants, it was the same pressure from former combatants (military veterans from different armies and former rebel groups) who are very influential on the local political scene that forced him to extend it "politically" to Yumbe District in 2015. This extension was entirely politically driven given the West Nile region had previously been opposition-leaning and President Museveni was keen to win it over to the NRM. To not

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arua_District (accessed: 22.04.2018).

⁴ <http://www.ubos.org/onlinefiles/uploads/ubos/2014CensusProfiles/ARUA.pdf>

respond to the demands of such an important political constituency as former combatants would have risked undermining efforts to undermine support for the opposition.⁵

How influential bellwether informants are talking about it

Informants in Arua raise several issues about the SCG. One is its sustainability particularly if it is extended all over the country. A senior local leader was doubtful about its sustainability because “The money required cumulatively is not small. The grants going to individuals are small, but cumulatively the sums are big.” As in Kiboga, the issue of data came up, as did the related challenge of selecting beneficiaries on the basis of age in a society where large numbers of elderly people do not know when they were born and therefore cannot say for sure how old they are. Another informant saw the issue of data as important because “Many elderly people are struggling. But the numbers are not clear. The issue should be studied and the numbers established. That is the only way of establishing the sustainability of the SCG.”

Away from data issues, some informants considered the question of sustainability from the point of view of the availability of resources. One informant asserted: “If the government did not spend so much on non-priority issues, Uganda is rich enough to sustain all of us regardless of age. The SCG would be sustainable if the government was not corrupt. Consider all the money that is stolen, all the loans Uganda takes, revenue collection by Ugandan Revenue Authority, and the size of the informal sector where many businesses are not registered and taxed. This country is not poor.”

There is also the view that the implementation of the SCG is yet another example of government programmes that are “rushed because of politics.” According to a senior local leader: “These things are rushed because they become political as people pressurise the government for them to be implemented. Pressure becomes difficult to resist when they become political campaign issues and the opposition take them up as causes.” One way of ensuring sustainability, he suggested, is by dividing the elderly into categories: those who need the grant and those who don’t, who can still work. Those “who are badly off should receive money so they can manage their last days better.” However, those who can work should not receive handouts. Instead they “should be trained and given loans.” He acknowledged, however, that loans would probably be “too stressful for them”, in which case they should not be required to repay the said loans with interest.

Also, there are elderly people with adequate means to look after themselves or with children who take care of them. These are seen as undeserving of support: “It should be given selectively. It should not be given to those who are well to do or who have children that look after them, or even those with pensions or savings with the National Social Security Fund. Assessors of eligibility should also look at physical wellbeing, quality of housing, and access to food.” Informants who argued for such means testing were of the view that the SCG should not be an entitlement for all the elderly: “Some elders are doing better than younger people. Some even still sit on the boards of statutory bodies.”

In addition to the elderly and the opposition pressing for the SCG to be implemented, another issue attracting interest is how the beneficiaries will be selected. The District Chairman maintained: “In Arua selection will be left to the technical people. But the criteria for selection should be explained

⁵ Frederick Golooba-Mutebi, B. Bukenya & G. Sseruwagi, 2018. ‘The Political Economy of Refugee Hosting Districts: A Case Study of Arua, Moyo and Yumbe Districts.’ Study commissioned by DFID-Kampala.

thoroughly and made clear. People will complain if they are left out, but so long as the selection has been transparent, that can be managed. If they involve us who are political, you can't rule out manipulation." Another informant emphasised the risk entailed in involving politicians: "There is a risk of politicians influencing the selection of beneficiaries. This is what is happening with Operation Wealth Creation. NRM supporters and sympathisers are given things ahead of others. Here in Arua the MP of Arua Municipality used anti-poverty programmes to advance his political interests. Former opposition MPs would not have been voted out if it wasn't for these programmes."

Possible political impact of the SCG

Informants generally believed it would boost support for President Museveni and the NRM and undermine further prospects for an opposition comeback. A key opinion leader believed: "It is a good opportunity for patronage. Those who receive it will be eternally grateful. That is why it was taken to Yumbe; votes were at stake." A former public servant provided more insight: "For the poor it is big money. People are really poor. Some of them have never seen that kind of money. Even me, it takes me 2 weeks to see 10,000 shillings (£2). That is how I have discovered the value of money. People have been voting for the NRM because they were given 500 shillings (£0.1). Things are bad, my friend; things are bad. People in Arua are crying for SAGE. Give it to them and the man (Museveni) will take all the votes." Nonetheless, if these claims are valid, the SCG will simply bolster support for President Museveni and the NRM which they have already built up by building and repairing roads and extending electricity supply and a wide range of anti-poverty programmes to the district.⁶

The Value of the SCG

The LC5 chairman said he had "picked up lessons from Nebbi and Zombo" where the SCG has had "lots of impact." Its impact lies in the fact that in the other districts where it is being implemented "it is people who have not planned for their old age that go for the money. Few Ugandans prepare for old age. When those who are working retire, they lose their social networks. They become miserable; suddenly, life changes." In Arua, as in Kiboga, there are two ways of looking at the value of the SCG. One is its monetary value, the other is the need within society for such a scheme.

In both districts informants generally see the SCG as small but of immense value to the recipients. One informant in Arua who believed that the monthly grant was 20,000 shillings (£4) (rather than the actually 250,000Sh (£5)) shillings per month, argued: "For people whose children have abandoned them, it would make a difference. One can buy a banana and a calabash of kwete. That is his meal for the day. During political campaigns politicians were giving 5,000 shillings (£1) to the poor. They would be grateful for it. They could buy salt and sugar with it. The poor are grateful for small monies."

Besides considering the direct financial impact of the SCG, it is also of value in meeting the need within society to provide for the elderly more generally. In many cases families, especially in rural areas, are organised and live communally as extended families or members of lineages. Under normal circumstances, informants emphasised, they look out for each other. The elderly depend on their children and close relatives for sustenance. Even if they have no access to money, they are fed and housed and clothed. When their children migrate or when there are no children, relatives provide support.

⁶ See, Golooba-Mutebi, Bukenya & Sseruwagi, *ibid*.

However, this traditional system has weakened considerably. These days, people provide support only in extreme cases. It is not rare to find elderly people living alone and dying in their houses unnoticed. In some cases it is because the children have migrated in search of work or are also struggling to support themselves: “The extended family system is not broken, but people genuinely can’t help.” For the elderly such as these, “such a programme will be a salvation.” According to a local member of the clergy: “I see it as timely because the situation of the elderly is getting desperate. Some are left alone, starving for a long time.”

Some informants’ views, however, departed significantly from this in ways that potentially widen the debate. Such informants were mainly well-to-do local intellectuals and opinion leaders, among them retired public servants who had spent much of their working lives in Kampala and elsewhere. One believed that the SCG “is all about politics”, and that “it somewhat legitimises laziness.” She pointed out that people who are now in their 60s were in their early 30s when the NRM came to power. “What”, she asked, “did the government do to prepare them for old age?” She believes people should be encouraged, even forced, to work and provide for their old age while the government invests more money in health and education “because that is also fighting poverty.” Alternatively, she argued, “Maybe the government should introduce old people’s homes for the very vulnerable.” A former senior policy maker echoed this view: “I like what the National Social Security Fund is doing. People who are employed are being forced to save for old age. The government should think about a way to compel people who are not formally employed to save, as a governance method. I sometimes think that giving out free money is rewarding laziness, even if some elderly people are deserving.”

What the government should bear in mind in rolling out the SCG

There was broad agreement among informants that corruption is a threat to the implementation of the SCG. According to a member of the local clergy, “The corruption which has engulfed many government institutions may undermine its impact. The corrupt may take advantage.” And as we have seen in the preceding discussion, some informants feel the government ought to take care to categorise the elderly properly before deciding who should receive the SCG and who should not, and the grounds for arriving at the decision, if the grant is to be sustainable.

Conclusion

Although there are a few differences here and there between attitudes towards social protection and specifically the SCG at national level and within the two districts, over all there is a great deal of complementarity. Perhaps the biggest difference is in thinking about the value of the SCG. While informants in Kampala are largely of the view that 25,000 shillings is very little money, and in many ways it is, if evaluated against the cost of living locally, within the two districts the overwhelming view is that that amount of money is substantial not least because it helps recipients of the SCG take care of their basic personal needs and where applicable, those of their dependants. Also significant is the difference in perception regarding the quality of the SCG’s implementation, with informants in Kampala convinced of the absence of corruption while in Kiboga they cited instances of suspected corruption and in Arua scepticism about the possibility of its implementation free from corruption especially if access is widened to cover the whole country and larger numbers of beneficiaries. Also, well as informants in Kampala were apt to argue that the elderly are looked after by their families and that therefore there is really no need for the SCG, it is clear that both in Kiboga where implementation has been underway for seven years and in Arua where it is yet to begin, demand for the SCG is high, not

only among the elderly, but also their families and other groups such as the disabled and the destitute who see themselves as deserving of assistance. Moreover, in Kiboga there is already evidence of bitterness among the excluded, a potential source of local-level tensions if the SCG is rolled out across the country before the issue of eligibility criteria is examined again with a view to including other factors beyond age.

At the level of similarity, within the districts as in Kampala, the issue of whether the SCG should be an entitlement or a gift provided at the discretion of the government is contentious, the key source of the contention being its affordability given resource constraints stemming from Uganda being a poor country. That said, there is also the view that the question of sustainability could be more easily settled through careful determination of eligibility criteria focusing mainly on those criteria that would help keep the number of beneficiaries low and manageable. Here informants in the districts argue, as did some in Kampala, for targeting on the basis of personal circumstances rather than using blanket, poverty-status-blind criteria such as age.

Even then, knowledge at both ends of the SCG being part of a broader set of interventions in the context of the NSPP is limited. Meanwhile in both instances many informants strongly identify the SCG with President Museveni's politics overall, as evidenced by what in their opinion was a rushed and political decision to include Yumbe District among the early implementers of the programme. Also, at both ends it is well understood that parliamentarians and locals are interested in widening access to the SCG not least because of its potential to boost their standing among the electorate. And as with some informants in Kampala, in Arua questions were raised about whether cash transfers should be prioritised as an anti-poverty measure ahead of basic services in education and health, both of which are seen as anti-poverty tools.

Recommendations

These findings lead to two recommendations.

The first is that the bellwether method has been successfully used to develop a baseline which can be used to assess the impact of ESP II, and as such the same method should therefore be applied to future investigation into views about the senior citizens grant and social protection more broadly in both districts at the end of the ESP II period to establish how perceptions may have changed in relation to programme implementation.

The second is that the bellwether method may usefully be applied as a rapid, low cost and practical approach to gain insight into perspectives on the SCG and social protection overall at district level, giving voice to perspectives which might not otherwise be accessible to programme managers, and as such is an appropriate tool for making such assessments in the future.

Appendix 1: Informants

A. Kiboga District

Informant Designation
Community Development Officer (CDO)
Deputy Resident District Commissioner
District Internal security Officer (DISO)
Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)
Resident District Commissioner (RDC)
Deputy Chairman, LC5
INGOs, Kiboga District Office
Bank Managers, Kiboga Branch
Guest House Managing Director
Parish Development Committee Members
Former MP

B. Arua District

Informant Designation
Assistant Chief Administrative Officer
Community Development Officer
Church representative
Former Mayor
Former MP
Representative Muslim Supreme Council
Refugee Liaison Officer
Chairman (LC5)
Representative Arua Catholic Diocese
Representative, Democratic Party
Retired civil servant
NGO Coordinator

Appendix 2: National-level Bellwether Questions

1. What three issues are the most important antipoverty initiatives at the top of the national policy agenda?
 - *Invite them to name three in order of priority and tell you a little about each and why*
2. Have you heard about the NSPP and its implementation?
 - *What can they tell you about it and progress in implementation?*
 - *Have they heard of it, how did they hear about it?*
 - *Note if they can name any of the grants and know about their design and purpose*
 - If not, have you heard about cash transfers?
 - *What can they tell you about it and progress in implementation?*
 - *Have they heard of them, how did they hear about them?*
 - If not, have you heard about SAGE or money for the elderly, or the proposed child grant?
 - *What can they tell you about it and progress in implementation?*
 - *Have they heard of them, how did they hear about them?*
3. What individuals, constituencies, or groups do you see as the main advocates for realisation of the NSPP/grants?
 - *Omit if they haven't heard of the NSPP/grants at all*
 - *If they have try to explore what do you think their reasons for promoting these policies?*
4. Who do you see as the main opponents? Have you heard any one criticising or arguing against these interventions? Why do you think they do that?
 - *Omit if they haven't heard of the NSPP it at all*
 - *If they have try to explore what they think the motives and interests of the different opponents are*
5. What do you personally think about these things?
 - Considering the current social political and fiscal context, do you think the NSPP should be fully implemented now or in the near future? Why/why not?
6. Looking ahead, how likely do you think it is that NSPP will be fully implemented in the next 5 years? Why/why not?
7. If the NSPP is adopted, what issues do you think the state needs to be most concerned about related to its implementation?

Appendix 3: District-level Bellwether Questions

1. What are the main government antipoverty initiatives in this district?
 - *The question was left open-ended to allow informants to name as many initiatives as they could remember. The objective was to see if they would name the SCG without being prompted.*
2. Have you heard about the NSPP and its implementation?
 - *(If so) What do you know about it and progress in its implementation?*
3. Have you heard about SAGE or money for the elderly?
 - *(If yes) - What do you know about it and progress in its implementation?*
 - *(If yes) - How did you hear about it?*
4. What individuals, constituencies, or groups do you see as the main advocates for realisation of the SCG?
 - *(If mentioned) What are their reasons for advocating for the SCG?*
5. Who do you see as the main opponents of the SCG? Have you heard any one criticising or arguing against its implementation? Why do you think they do that?
 - i. *If they have try to explore what they think the motives and interests of the different opponents are*
6. What do you personally think about these things?
 - *Considering the current social political and fiscal context, do you think the SCG should be fully implemented now or in the near future? Why/why not?*
7. Looking ahead, how likely do you think it is that SCG will be fully implemented in the next 5 years? Why/why not?
8. If the SCG is adopted, what issues do you think the state needs to be most concerned about related to its implementation?