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Why Social Protection programmes have attracted domestic political support in Uganda: Evidence from Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment (SAGE) Pilot programme.

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Abstract

This paper examines why Social Protection interventions such as the current Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment (SAGE) pilot programme in 14 districts of Uganda has attracted more domestic political support in the recent years than before 2006. The paper further highlights the political factors that were previously an obstacle to the implementation of social protection programmes including the predominant political (and socio-economic) paradigm factors, negative elite attitudes, politics within institutions and lack of genuine knowledge among stakeholders about social protection. The paper also examines factors that have contributed to the increased domestic political support for the SAGE pilot programme in Uganda. The factors discussed include Civil Society pressure, donor support and policy influence, the current political environment and institutional capacity building through trainings as well as study trips. The paper demonstrates that over the past few years, there has been an effort to increase knowledge and discussions on the need for social protection and its affordability in Uganda which has attracted the attention of politicians. The paper indicates that “political buy-in” is necessary to ensure that social protection is given a high priority and is sustained. The paper concludes by arguing that politics in Uganda remains a central aspect in social protection advocacy in Uganda. As such, it is vital that domestic political support is won if social protection interventions such as SAGE are to be recognized as a priority policy and budget issue for Uganda.

Introduction

For the last two decades, Uganda has made impressive socio-economic progress as reflected in government investment in infrastructure, energy, education and health. Uganda is one of the fastest growing economies in Africa. The country’s real GDP growth averaged 7% per year between 2000 and 2012.² Poverty has reduced from 56 % to 24.5 % between 1992/93 and 2009/10³. However, the 2012/2013 Household Survey Report indicated that 22.1% of the Ugandan population (more than 7.5 million) still live in extreme poverty, unable to meet their basic minimum living requirements.⁴ An additional 43 % of the population (13 million people) are barely above the poverty line and are vulnerable to falling into extreme poverty in the event of any shock to their income, ill health, disability, death of family member or climate-related risks.⁵ As a result many people experience hunger, malnutrition and have limited access to health and education. The situation is worse among the older persons with 30 % in extreme poverty and 71 % of households with an older person are highly vulnerable to fall in extreme poverty.

² Millennium Development Goals Report for Uganda 2013: Drivers of MDG progress in Uganda and Implications for post-2015 Development Agenda. Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, September 2013. Also available on <http://www.ug.undp.org/content/dam/uganda/docs/UNDPUG-2013MDGProgress%20Report-Oct%202013.pdf> accessed on 17th April 2014.

³ The Integrated Household Survey 1992/93, and the Uganda National Household Surveys 1999/2000-2009/10

⁴ Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2014), Uganda National Household Survey 2012/13

⁵ Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED)(2012). Uganda Poverty Status Report

The vulnerability of older people and their families is clearly demonstrated by the fact that the households that slipped into poverty between the 2005/6 and 2009/10 national household surveys were also those that registered the greatest increases in old age dependency ratios. Many older persons experience social exclusion, discrimination and continue to bear the burden of caring for over 60% of orphans and vulnerable children (1.8 million OVCs).⁶ These children suffer disproportionately from malnutrition and stunting – which harms their intellectual development and are unable to access sufficient years of education. Therefore, the poor and vulnerable are excluded and unable to benefit or contribute to Uganda’s economic development. Excluding such a sizeable proportion of Ugandans is detrimental to social cohesion and political stability and poses a threat to Uganda’s socio-economic progress. In response to such situations, the government of Uganda has put in place a number of programmes one of them being Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment (SAGE) which targets the elderly, vulnerable and marginalized persons.

Evolution of the Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) programme in Uganda

Uganda is one of the developing countries in Africa that have embraced social protection interventions in recent years. This is evident in its commitments to declarations at international and regional level such as the Livingstone Call for Action (2006) and African Union Social Policy Framework (2008), among others. In addition, Uganda has formulated a number of policies, enacted some policy frameworks such the National Development Plan (NDP) and designed interventions which contain aspects of social protection. Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) is one of the most recent social protection interventions that target poor persons in Uganda.

Following recommendations of the Chronic Poverty Report (2005)⁷, Uganda through the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) has been involved in social protection debates, both at national and international level. Furthermore, since 2006 the MGLSD working with the Social Protection Sub-committee has championed efforts to promote a coordinated approach to social protection in Uganda. These efforts and the debates culminated into designing of the Expanding Social Protection (ESP) Programme. Other factors that led to the SAGE pilot programme include donor insistence, the country’s changing social programmes and priorities, among others. SAGE is part of the broader Expanding Social Protection (ESP) Programme designed in 2009 to reduce chronic poverty and improve life chances for poor men, women and children by embedding a national social protection system within Uganda’s national planning and budgeting.⁸

⁶ Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Situation Analysis (2009)

⁷ Development Research and Training (2005). Chronic Poverty in Uganda: The Policy Challenges

⁸ Bukuluki, p. and Watson, C. (2012). Transforming Cash Transfers: Beneficiary and community perceptions of the Senior Citizens Grant (SCG) in Uganda.

SAGE is a cash transfer scheme specifically targeted at labour-constrained individuals and households (people with increased vulnerability to poverty due to reduced ability in productive activity). SAGE is a five year (2010-2015) pilot programme that was officially launched and approved by the Cabinet in 2010. SAGE is currently targeting two mechanisms. (1) Senior Citizen Grant (SCG) that is paid to older persons aged 65 years of age and above (but 60 years in the case of the of karamoja region). (2) Vulnerable Family Grants (VFG) paid out to households with low labour capacity owing to age, physical disability, etc and high dependency (on others because they cannot work). The SAGE covers 14 districts⁹ across the four country sub-regions, chosen according to an index based on share of specific demographic groups (children, elderly, OVCs) as well as on health and education criteria. A mix of socio-demographic and infrastructure proxies¹⁰ based on the 2002 Uganda Population and Housing Census was used.¹¹ The probability of being a pilot district for the SAGE pilot programme was dependent on increases with the score index after summing up of all the proxies in a district. The SAGE pilot programme is providing a direct income support of UGX. 25,000/= on monthly basis to over 113,000 older persons and vulnerable in the 14 pilot districts.

The implementation of Expanding Social Protection (ESP) Programme started in June 2010. The programme is led by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) and supported financially by Department for International Development (DFID), Irish Aid and technical support from UNICEF. The current funding ends in February 2015. Besides financial support, the Government of Uganda is also supporting the programme in-kind in terms of personnel, office space among others all amounting to UGX.6 billion to the running of the programme over the 5 years.¹²

Politics of Social Protection programmes specifically SAGE in Uganda

Politics in Uganda plays a key role in determining policy and programme responses to poverty eradication. This politics is evident among the political actors, in the political institutions, and at global level specifically the donors.

In early 2000s, Politics was a big obstacle to the implementation of social protection interventions in Uganda. However, this has changed after the year 2006 where we see a lot of domestic political support for poverty eradication programmes. The failure to invest in social protection programmes in the past lied in set of political factors. These Political factors shaped the context in which effective decision making on pathways for the poorest needed to take place, and how pro-poor policies should be adopted. Some of these political factors include;

⁹ The 14 districts are Apac, Kaberamaido, Katakwi, Kiboga, Nebbi, Kyenjonjo, Moroto, Nakapiripirit, Amudat, Kyegagwe, kyankwanzi, Zombo, Napak and Kole.

¹⁰ The proxies were: share of children in the entire population, share of the elderly persons in the entire population, share of orphans, and vulnerable children in the child population, share of risky births, proportion of households living more than 5 km from health facilities and share of children (6-12 years) not attending school

¹¹ Oxford Policy Management (2012). Evaluation of the Uganda Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment (SAGE) programme. Also available at http://www.opml.co.uk/sites/opml/files/SAGE%20IE%20baseline%20report_final_20130815_0.pdf

¹² ESP News, September 2013

The predominant political (and socio-economic) paradigm factors especially among economists with emphasis of driving the country's development agenda on economic growth. This agenda was mostly centered on maintenance of macro-economic stability (with emphasis being on low inflation and an open economy) to foster direct foreign investments; investment in infrastructure (especially roads); and promotion of micro-credit and demand-driven agricultural extension, emphasizing value addition and small holder commercial agriculture. Such an agenda sadly left out the larger proportion of the poorest of the poor known as "have-nots".¹³ The economists believed that economic growth will reduce poverty and that the chronically poor are residual groups who need simply specialized welfare programmes. A key informant in the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development said that "*economics is politics and politics is not long term. Politics only has 5 years to deliver and therefore politicians are looking to make clear impacts and dealing with deeper poverty is perceived as less likely to show impacts quickly enough. If assistance is not likely to raise targeted beneficiaries above poverty line quickly then the political benefits of prioritizing these actions are not apparent*".¹⁴ This particular approach to political economy with predominance of economic growth agenda inhibited the response and allocation of resources for improving the productive capitals of marginalized and vulnerable groups.

There are also factors that were related to negative elite attitudes. Anecdotal information and research suggests that many elites in Uganda, in addition to having a relatively homogeneous set of perspectives on poverty, also tend to have negative views about social assistance programmes for the poorest. The elites have sometimes castigated for example social protection as being a western driven agenda, unaffordable for Uganda and a catalyst for dependency among the poor. The elites have relatively benign image of the poor, a strong sense that such categories of people 'are deserving and therefore need to be assisted' but also are quick to apportion blame to the poor and in particular citing laziness and lack of innovation or poor attitudes towards work. One of the strongest opposition was during the time when the government of Uganda announced the plan of introducing a cash transfer pilot scheme (current SAGE) for the chronically poor came from mostly the elites including those who are responsible for driving the country's economic policy.¹⁵ An informant from the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED) said that many influential people are not sensitive to poverty issues, and would argue for different priorities-illustrated by the following typified quotes '*the country is not only about vulnerable poor people; what about protecting those that have come out of poverty; no free cash to reward people for being poor; growth is key everything else is secondary*'.¹⁶ With such a statement, it indicated that the government was not interested in poor and vulnerable persons and never qualified to be a priority.

¹³ Charles Lwanga-Ntale, the Imperative of Winning Political Support for Social Protection in Uganda. September 2008.

¹⁴ Ursula Grant (2006). Research into policy processes: Bringing global evidence on social protection into local policy contexts. Background Paper to the Chronic Poverty Report 2008-09.

¹⁵ Charles Lwanga-Ntale (2008), The Imperative of Winning Political Support for Social Protection in Uganda.

¹⁶ Ursula Grant (2006). Research into policy processes: Bringing global evidence on social protection into local policy contexts. Background Paper to the Chronic Poverty Report 2008-09.

Furthermore, the elites had a belief that anti-poverty national programmes have predominately failed in Uganda, even though some would argue that moderate progress had been achieved on poverty reduction. The lack of faith in the government action on poverty further contributed towards pushing the social protection agenda even further down the list of priorities.¹⁷

The other obstacle to implementation of social protection programmes such as SAGE was genuine lack of knowledge on social assistance programmes. This was an evident fact among some stakeholders including those implementing social protection programmes and politicians. There was limited knowledge on what social protection is, its benefits and how it is implemented in addition to the lack of policy framework to guide the implementation of social protection.¹⁸ Furthermore, there was some feeling that donors involved in the influencing social protection in Uganda (mainly DFID and World Bank) were giving mixed signals about social protection. The World Bank was guided by their social risk management (SRM) framework whereas DFID by vulnerability and poverty frameworks.¹⁹ With such mixed signals, there was a barrier to maintaining enthusiasm and initiating any pilots as well as conceptualizing social protection among the different stakeholders.

Politics was also exacerbated among the institutions specifically Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED) and Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) with a question which ministry should manage social protection, The MFPED being the most powerful institution responsible for resource allocation while MGLSD having the constitutional mandate to spearhead social development in the country. The biggest concern among the two institutions was the former accusing the latter of having limited capacity for financial and technical capacity to implement social protection in Uganda.²⁰ There were concerns from some stakeholders that the MGLSD was too weak to cope with the coordination role of social protection. Informants from the MFPED argued that the responsibility had to be held within an institution such as MFPED, Office of Prime Minister and the President's Office, with real power if social protection was to be taken seriously in Uganda. This brought in debates as other persons were acknowledging and suggested to build from the efforts of the MGLSD, and work with it rather than against it.²¹ This was worsened by the lack of a common

¹⁷ Charles Lwanga-Ntale (2008), The Imperative of Winning Political Support for Social Protection in Uganda.

¹⁸ Onapa, P. (2010) Championing Policy Engagement on Chronic Poverty and Social Protection in Uganda: Experiences from Development Research and Training (DRT): Paper delivered during the International Conference: 'Ten Years of War Against Poverty': What have we learned since 2000 and what should we do 2010-2020, 8th-10th September 2010, Manchester, United Kingdom.

¹⁹ Ursula Grant (2006). Research into policy processes: Bringing global evidence on social protection into local policy contexts. Background Paper to the Chronic Poverty Report 2008-09.

²⁰ Onapa, P. (2010) Championing Policy Engagement on Chronic Poverty and Social Protection in Uganda: Experiences from Development Research and Training (DRT): Paper delivered during the International Conference: 'Ten Years of War Against Poverty': What have we learned since 2000 and what should we do 2010-2020, 8th-10th September 2010, Manchester, United Kingdom.

²¹ Ursula Grant (2006). Research into policy processes: Bringing global evidence on social protection into local policy contexts. Background Paper to the Chronic Poverty Report 2008-09.

understanding on social protection by the different ministers as exacerbated by the lack of a common understanding of social protection among various ministries.²²

The politics of Social Protection in Uganda has largely been revolving around financing or affordability of the schemes. Some stakeholders like politicians have always argued that financing social protection programmes from domestic resources will lead to redirecting funds from other areas of national budget expenditure or require substantial improvements in revenue raising capacity. They believe that for a developing economy like Uganda that is still struggling to reach the tax revenue expectations, financing social protection programmes would be quite challenging. However, in the recent years, there has been much support for social protection programmes as result of number of factors that have changed the perceptions and attitudes of the stakeholders. These will be explored in the next section.

Why Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment has attracted more domestic political support in Uganda in the recent years.

Since 2006²³, social protection programmes in Uganda have attracted more political support than before as seen in the previous section of the paper. There have been a number of registered successes such as integration of social protection into the National Development plans (NDP) (2010/11-2014/15),²⁴ Uganda Vision 2040,²⁵ introduction of SAGE pilot programme and draft of National Social Protection Policy Framework ready for the cabinet's approval. There are a number of factors that explain why social protection programmes such as SAGE pilot programme have attracted more domestic political support. These factors are explored in this section as seen below;

Civil Society Organizations' pressure: CSOs in Uganda have played a significant role in pressurizing the government to take up social protection programmes to target the different categories of poor and vulnerable persons in the country. CSOs have done this through advocacy and lobbying, campaigns and engagements with different key stakeholders including politicians in the country. Given the need to win political and institutional backing, CSOs such as Development Research and Training (DRT) implemented various approaches including 'co-option'. Key officials both the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED) and Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) were identified as focal persons and constantly engaged to not only shape DRT's agenda on chronic poverty and social protection but also act as channels to engage their political leadership within the ministries on the benefits of addressing chronic poverty through social protection.

²² ibid

²³ Social Protection emerged as an important intervention during the process of formulating the first Social Development Investment Plan (SDIP) (2003-2008). However, until 2006 nothing happened as far as social protection is concerned Uganda.

²⁴ The National Development Plan (NDP) can be accessed via <http://npa.ug/wp-content/themes/npatheme/documents/vision2040.pdf>

²⁵ The Uganda Vision 2040 can be accessed at <http://npa.ug/wp-content/themes/npatheme/documents/vision2040.pdf>

Furthermore, DRT identified the ‘shakers’ and ‘movers’ of policies such as the permanent secretary (MFPED), well aware that these have been instrumental in the implementation of initiatives that though theoretically supported social protection objectives, had been over politicized. Through these engagements, DRT was able to create an interface with the key stakeholders, an approach that greatly diffused the tensions resulting from the influence of politics.²⁶

Research and information provision: In order to change the people’s mindsets as well as providing more information about social protection and its importance in developing countries such as Uganda, Development Research and Training (DRT) always organized a series of formal and information meetings/ workshops targeting different stakeholders with different messages. These meetings have been backed up with the production of various advocacy materials including policy briefs, discussion papers, information, education and communication materials. For example, where some politicians were saying that social protection is a western driven agenda, through partnership DRT and Cross Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU) undertook a study in 2007 on “Culture and Social Protection for the poor in Uganda” to demonstrate that social protection is not a foreign concept but rooted within Uganda’s traditional systems and practices. Other studies include “*Social Protection in Uganda: A call for Action*”, among others all aimed at providing evidence and information on social protection and its need in Uganda. In order to attract a wider attention of stakeholders on social protection issues, DRT carried out a series of workshops in the different regions of Uganda targeting district politicians, technocrats and CSO representatives. The intention was to create knowledge and an understanding on social protection through provision of information as well as stimulating debates and demand for social protection initiatives. In addition, CSOs provided information to the government through the Civil Society Issues Paper on social protection to inform the design of National Development Plan (NDP) (2010/11-2014/15) specifically on the Social Protection theme. The NDP is a successor to the Poverty Eradication Action Plans (PEAPs) published respectively in 1997, 2000 and 2004, which guided the formulation of government policy and the implementation of programmes.²⁷

International Conferences: CSOs have organized a number of conferences to provide evidence on successful social protection schemes and its affordability in developing countries. For example in partnership with other key stakeholders, Development Research and Training (DRT) has been key in organizing such events. These include the most recent regional conference on “Financing Social Protection in East and Central Africa: Learning from experience” held in October 2013. It was organized by Development Research and Training (DRT) and Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) with support from the Think Tank Initiative at International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES). The purpose of the

²⁶ Onapa, P. (2010) Championing Policy Engagement on Chronic Poverty and Social Protection in Uganda: Experiences from Development Research and Training (DRT): Paper delivered during the International Conference: ‘Ten Years of War Against Poverty’: What have we learned since 2000 and what should we do 2010-2020, 8th-10th September 2010, Manchester, United Kingdom.

²⁷ Civil Society input into PEAP revision and the Development of the 5-year National Development Plan (2008-2012)

conference was to stimulate discussion and learning about various options of financing of social protection programmes particularly in low income countries, especially in Eastern and Central Africa. The conference had delegates including social protection experts from a range of countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Mauritius, South Africa and Malawi where experiences were shared on what has worked in each of the countries. The conference was aimed at providing the government of Uganda that universal social protection programmes such as SAGE are affordable and urgently needed for Uganda. Previous conferences organized include the 1st International Conference on Social protection for the poorest in Africa that was organized by DRT in partnership with other stakeholders that included the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC), Brookes World Poverty Institute (BWPI), The Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, Swiss Development Cooperation and UNICEF. This conference was aimed at furthering learning on social protection. It targeted a number of stakeholders including politicians and government institutions such as Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. The conference presentations and discussions proved relevant to Uganda's efforts to develop and implement social protection initiatives.

CSOs' participation on Social Protection Committees and formation of Platforms: CSOs have been very active on a number of committees and platforms where they have been able to advocate and lobby for social protection programmes such as SAGE. The participation of the CSOs on social protection committees dates back in 2002 when a Social Protection Task Force (SPTF)²⁸ was established to explore social protection options for Uganda.²⁹ The SPTF was later transformed into a Social Protection sub-committee of the Social Development Sector Working Group with representation of CSOs, key ministries, Research institutions and donor representatives.³⁰ This sub-committee is the main leadership structure within the Government of Uganda on all social protection policy related issues and is responsible for initiating and leading on all social protection policy development, reform and coordination on behalf of the Government of Uganda. The SPTF's efforts in influencing social protection were first evident during the revision of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) in 2003-04, where committee made proposals for strengthening the social capital of the poor and enhancing social inclusion of the vulnerable groups in the country's mainstream development process. The committee identified the key risk and vulnerability issues to respond to as well as producing papers to support the process.³¹ The participation of the CSOs led to the integration of social protection in the 5th pillar of the third PEAP of 2004. It is through this committee that the CSOs have been very active in creating greater awareness as well as lobbying for social protection initiatives in the Uganda.

²⁸ The Social Protection Task Force (SPTF) was represented by the NGO and donor sectors, as well as government, housed in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, but included also the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, and the Office of the Prime Minister.

²⁹ Ursula Grant (2006). Research into policy processes: Bringing global evidence on social protection into local policy contexts. Background Paper to the Chronic Poverty Report 2008-09.

³⁰ Charles Lwanga-Ntale (2008). The Imperative of Winning Political Support for Social Protection in Uganda

³¹ Ursula Grant (2006). Research into policy processes: Bringing global evidence on social protection into local policy contexts. Background Paper to the Chronic Poverty Report 2008-09.

Furthermore, there are also administrative structures within the Expanding Social Protection (ESP) programme such as Steering Committee headed by the Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, with representation from Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, Ministry of Local Government, National Planning Authority, Office of Prime Minister, Ministry of Public Service, Uganda Local Governments Association, Civil Society and development Partners. This committee provides overall strategic guidance to the programme and the Civil Society has been very active at influencing and advocating for the programme.³²

CSOs have also initiated a **Uganda Social Protection Platform (USPP)** through which they have been able to advocate for social protection programmes specifically the roll-out of the senior citizens grant (SCG) nationally which is a core component of the SAGE pilot programme. Most of the advocacy work has been targeting the politicians such as Members of the Parliament (MPs) and Minister of Finance, Planning and Economic Development to influence the prioritization and allocation of more financial resources to the SAGE. The advocacy has been done through different approaches that include writing letters to the President of Uganda, Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and petition to Members of Parliament through the speaker. For example in August 2012, USPP wrote a letter to the Minister of Finance requesting the government to fulfill its commitments towards financing the SAGE pilot programme. In response on 28th August 2012, the Minister responded to the letter expressing the financial shortfall in the 2012/13 budgetary provision for the expanding social protection programme that was a reflection of resource constraints that had equally affected other government programmes. However, she said that the government remains committed to implementing sustainable mechanisms for alleviating vulnerability among the Uganda's population, in this case the elderly, in line with the Constitution, the National Development Plan (NDP) and the NRM manifesto. She added that the government shall, within available resources and competing priorities, continue to provide for programmes that address vulnerability.³³

Other advocacy and lobbying strategies used by USPP include; round table debates at various level; media through radio and TV talk shows at national, regional and local levels; engagement meetings and workshops with various stakeholders such as Uganda Local Government Association and National Local Councilors Association. There are also USPP partners that are carrying out engagements at district levels where they are engaging district politicians including chairpersons and lower level councilors. The Uganda Social Protection Platform (USPP) is a loose coalition of civil society organizations with interest in championing social protection as a means for tackling poverty and addressing risk and vulnerability in Uganda. The platform was founded by Development Research and Training (DRT), Action Aid International-Uganda, Cross Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU), National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda (NUDIPU),

³² ESP (2013). A brief on Expanding Social Protection Programme and its strategic role in Uganda's development

³³ Letter from Minister of Finance, Planning and Economic Development to Uganda Social Protection Platform (USPP) about "Fulfilling government of Uganda commitments towards financing social protection" written on August 28th, 2012

World Vision, Platform for Labour (PLA), Uganda Reach the Aged Association (URAA) and Plan International Uganda, in December 2007 and formally established in February 2011. The platform currently has over 50 members in the different parts of the country where they engage with the local politicians to embrace and support SAGE pilot programme.

Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Social Protection (UPFSP): Platforms have not stopped with CSOs but also Politicians have formed their own forum known as Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Social Protection – a body that brings together Members of Parliament (MPs) with an interest in and who support social protection. The forum was launched early this year (2014) and currently has over 40 members. The formation of such a forum that brings together members of parliament is an indication that social protection programmes specifically SAGE has gained political acceptance in Uganda. During the launch of the Forum, the Speaker of the parliament of Uganda challenged MPs that are members of the Forum to ensure that they lobby for funding for social protection so that the senior citizens grants are rolled out to the whole country. The speaker said that *“all older persons in all districts around the country deserve the grants and there is need to ensure that a budget is allocated to cover all senior citizens in all the districts of the country”*.³⁴ A number of MPs have requested the government of Uganda to allocate more funds to the Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment Programme (SAGE). For example, early this year during a press conference held at the Parliament of Uganda to address the challenges faced by elderly persons and programmes put in place to address them, the chairperson (Kyegegwa woman MP) of the Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Social Protection said that *“We want a national roll out so that all elder persons can benefit from this money. Only 14 districts out of 112 districts are benefitting which is a small number. This money is spent on health care, building houses and supporting the elderly people”*. All these indicate domestic political support for SAGE programme.

Study trips for politicians: Furthermore, in a bid to create an understanding of social protection and its importance, a number study trips to other countries where social protection programmes have been successfully implemented have been carried out in order to buy political will. For example, Development Research and Training made a recommendation to Department for International Development (DFID) to fund study tours for key government officials to Malawi and Zambia where cash transfers were being implemented. A team of key government officials and ministers from the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, and DRT were supported to visit Mchinjiji Cash Transfer project in Malawi in 2007. This exposure increased the appreciation and interest in social protection among the delegation which has since been a key pillar of the advocacy work.³⁵

In addition to the efforts of the CSOs, there have been a series of study tours targeting key decision makers in the different ministries in Uganda. The Expanding Social Protection (ESP)

³⁴ <http://www.socialprotection.go.ug/Parliamentary%20Forum%20on%20Social%20Protection%20launched.pdf>

³⁵ ibid

Programme Secretariat has also been one of the stakeholders organizing such trips in order to buy the political will of appreciating and influencing the roll-out of the senior citizen grant nationally. For example, in November 2011 a Uganda delegation comprising of six cabinet members and two MPs visited South Africa and Lesotho to learn about the direct income support programmes in the two countries. On return from the study trip, one of the delegates said that *“the government of Uganda should prioritize direct income support to older persons and commit to immediate but phased scale up of SAGE”*.³⁶

Recently in February 2014, ESP Secretariat organized another study trip to Mauritius and South Africa for politicians to understand the strategic importance of direct income support-a key social protection instrument, and how it has contributed to the development of the two countries. The delegates comprised of Hon. Mary Karoro Okurut, Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Hon. Richard Todwong, Minister for political Mobilisation, Office of the president, Hon. Rose Namayanja, Minister of Information and National Guidance, Hon. Sulaiman Madada, Minister of state for Gender, Labour and Social Development in charge of Elderly and Disability affairs, Hon. Margaret Komuhangi, Member of Parliament, and the Chairperson Parliamentary Committee on Gender, Labour and Social Development. Other members of the team included Mr. Pius Bigirimana, Permanent Secretary-Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Mr. Kenneth Mugambe-Director of Budget, Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, Mr. Daniel Graymore, Head of Office, DFID Uganda, Mr. Donal Cronin-Chargé d’Affaires, Embassy of Ireland, Mr. Stephen Kasaija-Head, Social Protection Secretariat, Ministry of Gender Labour & Social Development, among others.

While in the two countries, the delegates visited a number of institutions managing social protection programmes such as department of social development in Johannesburg-responsible for management and oversight of South Africa’s social protection policies and the local offices of South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) – the national agency created to manage the social grants. In Mauritius the delegates visited President of Mauritius who briefed them on how central social protection is in Mauritius’ politics and national development. They further met with the Minister of social security and National Reform Institutions, the vice Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in Mauritius. A number of information was provided to the delegation through presentations on social protection in the two countries. While in South Africa and Mauritius, the delegation also visited University of Witwatersrand and University of Mauritius respectively where they interacted with lecturers on the strategic importance of social protection to national development³⁷. All these study trips are aimed at providing information as well as influencing politicians on the need for social protection in Uganda.

³⁶ ESP(2013). A brief on Expanding Social Protection Programme and its strategic role in Uganda’s development. June 2013.

³⁷ <http://www.socialprotection.go.ug/Parliamentary%20Forum%20on%20Social%20Protection%20launched.pdf>

Donor support and influence for Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment: Donors have been very active in influencing the implementation of social protection programmes in Uganda. The influence has been evident at the national level development policy making where donors have been closely integrated within the national policy processes. Donors have shaped the politics of social protection in Uganda through their funding levels and agenda-setting powers. There are various ways through which donors have been influential as far as social protection is concerned in Uganda. For example, DFID was very strong influence towards the construction of the Social Protection Task Force (SPTF)³⁸. In 2007, DFID guided and supported financially the design of a cash transfer pilot (current SAGE pilot programme) for Uganda. Other forms of influence have been through supporting study trips as seen previously where DFID supported a team of delegates to Zambia and Malawi to learn about the cash transfer programmes in the two countries. There was another international study trip organized by World Bank to Finland for the Social Protection Task Force to see the social protection programmes at work.³⁹ Donors have also supported studies and conferences in Uganda to provide evidence on the need for social protection in the country. More importantly, the current five (5) year SAGE pilot programme is being funded by a range of donors including DFID, Irish Aid and UNICEF with a budget of £41 million. With such a huge proportion of funding by donors, the government of Uganda also pledged to provide counterpart funding of up to 15% in 2014/15.

Despite the fact that the government of Uganda has not been able to honor its counterpart financing obligations as per the joint Memorandum of Understanding signed with Development Partners, the government has been able to allocate some funds for the SAGE programme. For example, in financial year 2011/12, only UGX 30 million of the 125m committed was released, in financial year 2012/13, the Ministry of Finance allocated only UGX 39.5 million whereas in the financial year 2013/14 the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development allocated a total of UGX. 2 billion to the SAGE programme.⁴⁰ It has been revealed that the donors have expressed commitment to continue funding for the fourteen (14) SAGE pilot districts and the rollout of core delivery systems across the country beyond 2015 though this will be dependent on the government's commitment to provide counterpart funding during the pilot phase and extending the coverage of the senior citizen grant to more districts.⁴¹ Therefore, from the above evidence, one can conclude that the presence of the donor financial support has also attracted the attention of the politicians and government to allocate funds into the programme.

³⁸ Ursula Grant (2006). Research into policy processes: Bringing global evidence on social protection into local policy contexts. Background Paper to the Chronic Poverty Report 2008-09.

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ ESP news letter, September 2013

⁴¹ ESP (2013). A brief on Expanding Social Protection Programme and its strategic role in Uganda's development

The current political environment with competitions among the Political Parties in Uganda:

Uganda is a country with multiparty system of governance with many political parties that compete for votes from the citizens. Direct income support – a form of social protection programme has been used as a strategy to win elections in Uganda, and is being seen as political capital among citizens. This is evident in the manifestos of the different political parties in Uganda such as, Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) manifesto 2011-2016 page 21, stipulates “*providing cash transfer of UGX 50,000 every month to persons above 65 years*”.⁴² The Uganda People’s Congress (UPC) manifesto 2011 also recognizes the need for social protection schemes in Uganda. On page 17, the UPC political party plans and commits undertaking a study to explore feasibility of providing old age pensions to all elderly persons in Uganda.⁴³ This is not different from the National Resistance Movement (NRM) current ruling party. The NRM Manifesto, 2011-2016 also commits to provide direct income support to the elderly in Uganda. On page 41 of the NRM Manifesto it states that “*the NRM Government will roll-out the cash transfer program for older persons*”.⁴⁴ In addition, a number of Politicians have been quoted saying that the SAGE programme is an NRM Manifesto commitment to older persons. This was evident during the previous Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development on his visit to Kiboga – one of the SAGE pilot districts.⁴⁵ The SAGE programme has recently gained political support in different ways with in the current NRM ruling government. For example, following the successful setup of delivery systems and processes in Kaberamaido, Kiboga and Kyenjojo district, the programme was officially launched by His Excellency Vice President Edward Kiwanuka Ssekandi on behalf of H.E. President of Uganda on 1st October 2011. Also on 8th March 2012, His Excellency President Yoweri Museveni launched the programme in Nebbi district.⁴⁶ Several politicians have been seen participating in the launch of the SAGE programme in pilot districts. These include, Hon. Prime Minister, Amama Mbambazi who made the first payment of the senior citizen grant in Kyankwanzi district in October 2012.

Some politicians have praised both the implementation and the impact of the SAGE programme. For example, during the visit to Nebbi – one of the pilot SAGE districts on 5th July 2013 the Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development – Hon. Karooro Okurut Mary said that “*I am impressed by the work done by SAGE in Nebbi district. I have seen from my interaction with beneficiaries that they are putting the money they receive to good use. As government, we are committed to ensuring that the programme goes ahead and is scaled to other districts in the country*”. The Minister was accompanied by other stakeholders that included the Minister of state in-charge of Disability and Elderly Affairs, Head of DFID in

⁴² The FDC Manifesto 2011-2016 can be accessed via http://www.upcparty.org/images/upc_manifesto.pdf

⁴³ The UPC Manifesto 2011 can be accessed via http://www.upcparty.org/images/upc_manifesto.pdf

⁴⁴ NRM Manifesto 2011-2016. Prosperity for All: Better Service Delivery and Job Creation. Also available on <http://www.nrm.ug/sites/default/files/downloads/Manifesto.pdf>

⁴⁵ ESP Newsletter, April 2013

⁴⁶ ESP(2013). A brief on Expanding Social Protection Programme and its strategic role in Uganda’s development..

Uganda, DFID Social Development Advisor, Irish Aid Social Development Advisor, Director of Social Protection, among other officials.⁴⁷

Furthermore, evidence in Uganda currently indicates that there are prospects of rolling out the of the senior citizen grant nationally in Uganda. Based on the emerging impacts of the SAGE programme in the 14 pilot districts and the increasing public and political demand for the national roll-out of the programme, in August 2013 the President of Uganda directed the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development to expand the programme to Yumbe district. To respond to the President's directive, the Ministry decided to use the UGX.2 billion that were allocated in the 2013/14 financial year as counterpart funding by the government to implement the programme in the district. Current evidence from Yumbe district indicates that preparations for the rolling out of the senior citizen grant are in high gear. According to Yumbe district community development officer, the local council leaders and key stakeholders have been trained in the operational modalities of the programme and that the beneficiaries already been identified.⁴⁸ Yumbe will be the 15th district to benefit from the SAGE pilot programme.

More importantly, the President of Uganda has also directed the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development to agree a roll-out plan for the senior citizen grant which indicates each district will be brought on board and to publish the agreed roll-out plan in the media. In response to the President's directive, the two ministries carried out a study "*Cost and Financing Options on affordability of the national Senior Citizen Grant*" it was concluded that the government of Uganda can afford to roll out the programme. The report indicates that the programme can fully be financed from projected increases in revenue alone and would cost a maximum of 6.88% of the annual revenue increase dropping to only around 2% of the annual revenue increase from 2019/20 onwards. Therefore, the national roll-out of the programme could be implemented without the need for reallocating any existing expenditure or relying on development partners or borrowing. At full scale, the study concluded that a national senior citizen grant would cost only 2.09% of the total government expenditure and 3.76% of the recurrent expenditure. Therefore, from the above emerging events, it can be concluded that SAGE is a potential political capital in Uganda. This is evident in the SAGE pilot districts where most of the SAGE beneficiaries have equated the programme to NRM government. Some of them say that the cash grants are gifts from the president of Uganda to his voters.

Institution capacity building through trainings: Trainings conducted by key stakeholders such as Expanding Social Protection (ESP) Secretariat have also been among the factors that have attracted the domestic political support for SAGE programme in Uganda. Leadership capacities at various levels, for implementing the programme have been carried out right from the Ministry to district and the lower local government levels. A lot trainings have been done for different stakeholders both in government and outside for the purposes of implementation and monitoring of the programme. In the wider government, people have been trained across the

⁴⁷ ESP Newsletter, September 2013.

⁴⁸ Yumbe to roll out elderly grant by Drasimaku Richard, New vision, Wednesday, April 2, 2015

ministries. Some officers from the permanent secretaries, directors, commissioners, assistant commissioners and others have attended a special course conducted by Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI) based in Cape Town, South Africa. The Expanding Social Protection (ESP) Secretariat has developed a course conducted locally, “Social Transfers: Policy and Programming in Uganda.” This course is intended to significantly expand the number of Uganda officials who have received comprehensive training in the key social protection policy issues in Uganda. For example in December 2011, the first of session of the course was held and it attracted over 42 participants from various government departments with representatives from Office of Prime Minister, Office of the President, Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Ministry of Information and National Guidance, Ministry of Education and Sports and the National Planning Authority and civil society organizations. The training was conducted by the ESP secretariat, in conjunction with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and delivered by Development pathways, a group of experienced international development practitioners specializing in the social protection field and social development.⁴⁹

Not only limited to the technocrats, trainings have also been targeting politicians especially the local government levels. As Expanding Social Protection (ESP) programme starts to implement SAGE programme in the pilot districts, various trainings have been conducted. Politicians at the lower local government levels have been some of the participants in these trainings. These include the chairpersons and councilors at various levels – district, sub-county, parish and village level.⁵⁰ This is done because political leadership plays a role in overseeing and supporting development activities within their districts. SAGE has engaged the political leaders in carrying out monitoring activities. Furthermore, the district SAGE support unit shares regular performance reports with the district political leadership through the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO). Work plans, budgets and minutes of the quarterly SAGE programme management meetings are also copied to the district chairperson and the social service committee of the district councilors.⁵¹ Evidence from the SAGE pilot districts indicates a lot of domestic political leaders at various lower local government units since they are involved throughout the programme right away from its inception to implementation. This is further evident in the districts that are currently not benefiting from SAGE programme where politicians such as Members of Parliament, district councilors and lower local council leaders are demanding for enrollment of the SAGE pilot programme into their districts.

⁴⁹ <http://www.socialprotection.go.ug/policy%20and%20institutional%20development.php> accessed on 15th April 2014

⁵⁰ ESP (2013). Implementation Guidelines for Sub-County and Parish Staff

⁵¹ ESP (2013). Implementation Guidelines for Sub-County and Parish Staff

Conclusion

Based on the evidence emerging from Uganda's case as seen in this paper, it can be argued that in the recent years social protection has gained domestic political support in Uganda. Politics is central to shaping social protection policies and programmes. Politicians in various institutions provide significant incentives for and barriers to agenda setting and implementation of programmes. Furthermore, the ways in which political actors and pressure groups such as CSOs engage with the poor is very critical. Issues of limited knowledge and negative elite attitudes require urgent capacity building and provision of information. Last but not least donors are very critical actors in shaping the policy environment as well as attracting the attention of politicians through giving programmes such as social protection a high priority and ensure they are on policy agendas. Winning political will will remain relevant as far as social protection is concern in Uganda especially on the financial affordability which is a major issue among stakeholders especially politicians.

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