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THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES: A CASE OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE GRANT FOR EMPOWERMENT (SAGE) IN UGANDA.

BY JOHN BOSCO MUBIRU¹

¹ The author of this paper is a Social Protection Specialist and currently coordinates the Uganda Social Protection Platform (USPP). He holds a MSC public Policy and Human Development (with specialization in Social Protection Policy Design and Financing) from Maastricht Graduate School of Governance, Netherlands. He can be reached on email mubosc2006@yahoo.com and +256782160345

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Social protection has been recognized as a critical element of national development strategies in both developed and developing countries. Uganda have embraced social protection interventions in the recent years as key to achieving inclusive, pro-poor, and equitable development which is evident in its commitments to declarations at regional and international levels. The government has further established and implemented social protection interventions (both contributory and non-contributory schemes). The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development through the Expanding Social Protection (ESP) Programme with financial support from DFID, Irish Aid and UNICEF is piloting two schemes – Senior Citizen Grants (SCG) and Vulnerable Family Grants (VFG) under the SAGE programme.

The local governments have been among the key stakeholders in the implementation of the SAGE programme in the 15 pilot districts. They have participated in range of activities including identification, targeting and selection of beneficiaries; sensitization, awareness raising and community mobilizations; managing grievances; coordination; monitoring and reporting as well as providing office space. The participation of the local governments in SAGE has been attributed to some enabling factors that include the trainings; monthly allowances; logistical support; political capital of the programme and the clear mandate on the roles of local governments. However, local governments' participation in the SAGE programme have encountered a number of challenges such as staffing gaps; reporting challenges; inadequate financial resources and role conflicts. Despite the challenges, SAGE has also impacted on the performance and service delivery of the local governments in the pilot districts

In order to strengthen the effectiveness of the local government's participation and the objectives of the SAGE programme, there is need to create linkages between beneficiaries and other social services; mainstream SAGE in the local government plans and budgets; strengthen the coordination and information sharing and promoting social accountability.

1.0. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, Uganda has made great progress in reducing poverty and has made impressive socio-economic progress as reflected in government investment in infrastructure, energy, education and health. The country's real GDP growth averaged 7% per year between 2000 and 2012. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), poverty headcount reduced from 56% to 24.5% between 1992/93 and 2009/10 and has further reduced to 19.7% in 2012/13 (UBOS, 2014). However, persistent and extreme poverty and vulnerability remain among a significant number of individuals and households. According to the Uganda National Household Survey 2012/13, 6.7 million Ugandans live below the poverty line. Moreover, Uganda's national poverty line is estimated to be the equivalent to US\$ 0.53 per person per day, which is well below the international poverty line of 1.25 per person per day (MGLSD, 2014). The 2012 Poverty Status Report notes that although there has been significant progress in reducing poverty over the past ten years, many of those who seem to have escaped absolute poverty remain highly vulnerable. The report indicates 43% of Uganda's population as non poor but highly insecure and recognises social protection as an important intervention to address extreme poverty and vulnerability (MFPED, 2012).

In the recent years, social protection has gained prominence as a critical element of national development strategies to achieving inclusive, pro-poor, and equitable development in Uganda. Uganda is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Livingstone Call for Action (2006) and African Union Social Policy Framework (2008). In addition, government has formulated strategies, policies, Acts and policy with social protection commitments. Furthermore, designed a range of social protection programmes including contributory and non-contributory schemes like Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment (SAGE) have been established. A number of stakeholders are playing a role in the delivery of social protection at both central and local level. In Uganda, local governments have been a major delivery arm of public services partly due to close geographic proximity to beneficiaries and often considered to be able to provide services in a relatively efficient and cost-effective way which contributes to the administrative sustainability of service delivery. It is against this background that the author of this paper examines the role of local governments in social protection interventions with focus SAGE in Uganda.

The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD), in partnership with Development for International Development (DFID), Irish AID and UNICEF, have been implementing the SAGE through Expanding Social Protection (ESP) Programme since July 2010. The purpose of ESP programme is to embed a national social protection system including social assistance for the poorest and most vulnerable as a core element of Uganda's planning and budgeting processes. The programme adopts a holistic approach to embedding social protection through a) the development of a national social protection policy and costed strategy; b) institutional reform and capacity building within the MGLSD and across government as a whole; and c) engagement with political actors to build understanding and commitment to social protection. The SAGE is currently piloted in 15 districts and comprises a Senior Citizen

Grant (SCG) – for elderly aged 65 years and above (60 years in the disadvantaged Karamoja region) and Vulnerable Family Grant (VFG) that delivers small but regular and reliable direct income support to poor and vulnerable households. A total of 105,836 direct beneficiaries have enrolled to-date with over 80% benefiting the SCG. Both SCG and VFG beneficiaries receive Uganda shillings 50,000 (USD 20) bi-monthly and over USD14.9 million had been disbursed by end March 2014 through the MTN Mobile Money service (Namuddu et al, 2014).

1.2. RESEARCH SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

This paper was based on number of methods including a desk review to provide an overview of general issues on the local governments and service delivery and description of SAGE programme in Uganda. Among the documents reviewed included SAGE implementation guidelines, impact and evaluation reports, progress and operational research reports, ESP Newsletters, key messages delivered by government, donors and research institutes on the programme. The author also consulted the websites - MGLSD, ESP and Ministry of Local Governments. In addition, key informant interviews using open ended interview guides through administered questionnaires were shared with government officials, SAGE officials, CSOs in SAGE and local leaders in pilot districts. A thematic matrix was developed, to identify the roles and responsibilities undertaken by different levels of local governments (districts, sub-counties, parishes and villages) in the implementation and management of the SAGE.

This paper is organized into five main sections. The first section introduces the local government structures and briefly describes their roles in the delivery of the SAGE programme. The second section examines factors enabling local governments' participation in the delivery of SAGE. The third section discusses the impact of SAGE on the performance and service delivery of local governments. The fourth section presents the challenges that local governments encounter while participating in the delivery of SAGE programme. The fifth section suggests recommendations for strengthening the local governments participation in SAGE programme, policy and programme implications.

2.0. KEY FINDINGS

2.1. LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN UGANDA

Uganda has been pursuing a major decentralization programme since the late 1980s (Mugambi, Edward 2004). This policy is characterized by transfer of powers, functions and services from the central government to local councils. Local governments have councils with the highest political authority in their areas of jurisdiction, with both executives and legislative powers. They can make bye-laws that are consistent with national laws; they have powers to make, approve and execute development plans and budgets; raise revenues; appoint statutory commissions, boards and committee for personnel; hire and manage personnel and administer their own payroll and pension. The local government system is based on the district as unit under which are lower local governments and administrative units. Local government and administrative units are collectively known as local councils which are further characterized as either rural – district, county, sub-county, parish and village or urban – city, division, municipal, municipal division, Town council, parish/ward and village (Uganda Local Government Act 1997).

2.2. LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE GRANT FOR EMPOWERMENT (SAGE) IN UGANDA

In 2011, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the local governments to prepare for the implementation of the Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment (SAGE). The MOUs specify the roles and expectations of the various stakeholders in SAGE implementation. They also streamline SAGE operations within the local government structures. The signing of MOUs represented the first step of collaboration with the Ministry of Local Governments and Expanding Social Protection (ESP) Programme (ESP Newsletter, 2011). At the district level, the SAGE programme is integrated into local government councils as it will be discussed in the following section with focus on roles and responsibilities in the in the implementation and management of the SAGE.

Identification, targeting and beneficiary selection: At the lower sub-county level, local governance structures such as parish chiefs and Local councils are used to identify beneficiaries during the targeting process. Community based registration system is used only for SCGs in areas where civil registration processes have not been implemented. In these cases, village chairpersons and parish chiefs are responsible for compiling beneficiary lists and verifying eligibility based on available documentation such as birth or baptism certificates and voters' cards or testimony on historical events received and verified by village councils. For both SCG and VFG, and whether automated or community based, community verification processes are undertaken through local government structures - village chairperson and parish chiefs. The verification process differs slightly, between VFG, automated SCG, and community-based SCG. With the verification of VFG beneficiaries and automated SCG beneficiaries, the centrally

generated list is sent back to communities for verification – citizenship, residency and age at village verification. After the Parish Verification Meeting, the lists of beneficiaries (for both the SCG and VFG) are sent to ESP Secretariat that sends back an enrolment file to the payment service provider – MTN. Parish Committees (PCs) and Parish Development Committees (PDCs) mobilize beneficiaries (with IDs) for enrolment at the pay points. Enrolled beneficiaries receive SIM cards and open a money account, with the assistance of MTN staff (Calder, R. and A. Nakafeero, 2012).

Sensitizations, awareness raising and mobilization: The local government structures have been very relevant in raising awareness of and disseminating SAGE programme information including accessibility criteria, amount of the cash transfer, re-targeting, the pay points and next payment. The SAGE implementation guidelines indicate that the parish development committee members support communication and sensitization of SAGE activities. This applies to the village chairpersons and other members who carry out community mobilization and supporting effective up-and downward communications to the parish level. The village local council chairpersons further organize and facilitate SAGE village council meetings such as monthly and quarterly community meetings to generate feedback and address complaints.

Support to channel and manage grievances: Local government structures are used in the handling of the grievance and complaints that SAGE beneficiaries encounter. The village chairpersons are responsible for receiving complaints and forwarding them to the Parish chiefs or sub-county Community Development Officer (CDO). This process involves filing a SAGE complaints form by the beneficiary. The sub-county CDO provides feedback on what can be and is resolved at that level and forwards the rest to the district CDO responsible for SAGE. The district CDO works with the SAGE technical team to solve the grievances and send feedback to the communities through sub-county and parish respectively (USPP, 2013).

Coordination of the SAGE programme: Local government structures are used to coordinate the SAGE programme in the lower local governments. The chief administrative Officers are accountable for the programme delivery and distribution of funds. Direct oversight is provided by district community development officers (DCDOs), who report to the CAO at the district level. The SC-CDO coordinates day to day programme operations, including liaising with parish chiefs, parish development committees (PDCs) and Village council chairpersons. The Sub-county CDO reports directly to the senior CDO responsible for SAGE on operational matters and oversight of the sub-county operations is provided by the sub-county chief. The parish chiefs coordinate all SAGE activities at the parish and village levels and ensure effective and timely communication between the village and sub-county levels. The parish chiefs coordinate all SAGE activities at the parish and village levels and ensure effective and timely communication between the village and sub-county levels (MGLSD, 2012).

Monitoring and reporting: Local government structures participate in monitoring of SAGE programme at the lower local governments. The SAGE implementation guidelines indicate the

Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) is ultimately responsible for ensuring that all local government staff fulfil their roles effectively during the SAGE implementation. The CAO leads quarterly missions by the district executive committee and submits all quarterly narrative and financial reports to the MGLSD and ESP Secretariat. The district community development officer is also responsible for monitoring the programme through scheduled and on- the spot field visits. The senior community development officer undertakes regular monitoring missions as per the SAGE monitoring framework. In addition, the district community development officer chairs district SAGE coordination meetings, submitting monthly narrative reports and quarterly consolidated narrative and financial progress reports simultaneously to the SAGE operations manager at the ESP Secretariat and to the permanent secretary of the MGLSD through the CAO. The senior CDO reports directly to the DCDO and liaises directly with the SAGE operations manager and the district liaison officer at the ESP Secretariat. The sub-county chief also oversees the implementation of the SAGE programme at the sub-county level and he or she chairs the monthly sub-county SAGE coordination meetings. Also the senior community development officer is responsible for convening weekly SAGE unit meetings (MGLSD, 2012).

SAGE operation space: SAGE offices have been established within local government structures (from district level up to the sub-county level) in each of the pilot districts. Each SAGE office has been staffed with 3 technical officers and facilitated with equipment. These officers work directly under the community development officer's department at district. The government of Uganda besides its counter financing of the SAGE programme, it contributes in-kind in terms of personnel, office space among others all amounting to 6 billion to the running of the programme over the 5 year period (ESP Newsletter, 2013).

2.3. FACTORS ENABLING THE PARTICIPATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN THE DELIVERY OF SAGE PROGRAMME

Trainings: The ESP Secretariat has undertaken number of trainings targeting the local governments to build the capacity of implementers. These training are undertaken at various lower local governments targeting sub-county actors who include the parish chiefs or parish facilitators and sub-county community development officers. The district trainings are conducted through a cascade approach where the trainings start from the district, sub-county, parish and village level. The key objectives of the training the sub-county is to impart skills and knowledge so that they are able to lead SAGE implementation through sub-county, clarify roles and responsibilities related to sub-county operations and to prepare the sub-county CDOs and parish chiefs to train the village chairpersons and village council secretaries. This is all done to ensure that there is a common understanding of SAGE operations at all implementation levels.

Facilitation and monthly allowances: All the local government structures involved in the implementation of the SAGE programme are facilitated with monthly allowances that are rated according to their roles and responsibilities. For example, each CDO is given a motor cycle, allowance of UGX. 270,000/= for motor cycle maintenance, fuel allowance of UGX. 84,000/=

and UGX. 20,000/= credit for mobile phones. Also the sub-county chief receives a monthly allowance of UGX. 36,000/= and UGX. 20,000/= for mobile phone credit. The parish chiefs receive monthly allowance of UGX. 55,000/= and UGX. 10,000/= for credit airtime. The village council chairpersons and the PDCs are given monthly allowance of UGX. 10,000/= per month. The DCDO is facilitated UGX. 50,000/= for monitoring per month, and fuel of UGX. 450,000/=. This also applies to the other local government technocrats and politicians for their participation in SAGE programme. Such incentives have motivated the civil servants to engage in the implementation of the SAGE programme.

Logistical support and equipments: This district community based department in the pilot districts was provided with logistical support in terms of a car, motorcycles and office equipments such as furniture, computers, generators and stationery in each of the sub-counties where the programme is implemented. These have been enablers and motivating the departmental staff throughout the local government structures (ESP Newsletter, 2014).

The political capital of the SAGE: The political leadership in the pilot districts has been very active in the implementation of the programme given its political. The elected leaders such as chairpersons and councilors have been active in monitoring of the programme. These politicians believe that when SAGE is well implemented with a number of impacts on the beneficiaries and their households, it will plough back votes during the next elections.

The clear mandate of roles and responsibilities: The clear roles and responsibilities of the local governments as indicated in the memorandum of understanding between the MGLSD and Ministry of Local Government establishes functions of local government structures which in turn creates accountability frameworks for them. This is strengthened by the involvement of the local government officials right away from the on-set which has created commitment and ownership of the programme.

2.4. HOW SAGE HAS IMPACTED ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The SAGE programme has revitalized the visibility of the Community Based Service department which directly implements the programme. Before the advent of SAGE, the department was perceived as a rather insignificant often talked about in passing. The department lacked the necessary visibility and clout to mobilize the community for development. Today, the department is one of those highly regarded. The capabilities to mobilize for development have been restored.

In addition, the Programme has revived the hitherto dormant structures within the local government system. These include the Parish Development Committees (PDCs) which are grassroots community mobilization structures. The training of PDCs, and integrating them in Programme implementation processes like the Monthly Parish Coordination meetings, change management and mobilization of beneficiaries for payments has re-invigorated the PDC structure. These structures are now used to mobilize for other community development work

such as Functional Adult Literacy (ESP Newsletter, 2013). Similarly, the involvement of the Local Council executives who had hitherto limited their work to presiding over cases, has widened their role to include mobilization of the communities owing to the facilitation and motivation by SAGE. These structures are now more functional and relevant to their communities and therefore delivering better services

The SAGE programme has also opened up channels of communication within the local government structures in the pilot districts. SAGE has created forums in which information can flow from the districts to the sub-counties, parishes down to the villages. The communication channels are two way - flowing from top to bottom as well as bottom to top. For example, at the pay points - before payments are made to beneficiaries; there is a pre-payment address to them. In this address, information is passed by the district local government workers including the CDOs, other district officials and parish chiefs concerning community issues, ongoing campaigns, planned activities for the different villages. Feedback is also received on various services and issues affecting the community. Information is also exchanged and passed on during coordination meetings at the various levels such as during the district coordination meetings that are held monthly and attended by all CDOs and chaired by the DCDO. The CDO takes advantage of this forum to communicate all other issues concerning the department, plans for the new month and gets reports from the respective CDOs on the previous month activities.

For a long time, community development work has been a challenge in the lower government levels. As such community mobilization, monitoring of government programmes and the general awareness creation of various activities at that level among the communities has been very low. This was mainly attributed to the low morale of staff, lack of facilitation and inadequate resources to support the officers deliver on their responsibilities. Since SAGE came into the picture, community development work has change. The facilities/ equipment provided to the Community Development Officers have improved mobility and hence eased mobilization and field work which used to be a major hindrance to community development work. The Community Development Officers (CDOs) are now able to accomplish other tasks by integrating them into SAGE activities. The renovation of Community Development Department office and provision of office furniture made the CDOs' office more clients friendly (ESP Newsletter, 2014).

The SAGE programme has also revived Birth and Death registration in the pilot districts especially where Vulnerable Family Grants (VFGs) that uses automated selection of the beneficiaries is being implemented. The communities that were registered received short birth certificates. In addition, the mobile virtual Record System has also been roll-out to the sub-counties to promote birth registration (ESP Newsletter, 2014).

The SAGE programme has also increased the participation of the district leadership in supervision and involvement in government programme implementation. This is evident by the local government including the Chief Administration Officers, District Chairperson, District Planning Department and Community Development Department in the monthly and quarterly monitoring exercise of the SAGE and other programmes.

The SAGE programme has also impacted on the local economy of the districts. The local governments have been able to benefit indirectly through collection of more dues and taxes from the markets and traders during the pay days at the pay points (ESP Newsletter, 2014).

2.5. CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Staffing gaps: The SAGE programme is implemented through the tiered local government systems, relying on staff such as the district and sub-district community development officers (DCDO, SD-CDO), sub-county and parish chiefs. However, the effective implementation of the SAGE programme has been hampered by staffing gaps in some lower local government levels where some positions are vacant (e.g. some parishes do not have substantive parish chiefs). These have hindered the effective implementation and monitoring of the programme.

Reporting challenges: Although SAGE offices at the district level are equipped with a generator and computers, the situation is different at sub-county level, with CDOs having to write reports manually, which sometimes delays processes. Data processing also takes time, as CDOs have to deliver forms to the management information system (MIS) officer at the district, who then enters the data into the system. These delays affect the effective implementation of the programme. In other cases, some duty bearers especially the village council chairpersons are illiterates and unable to file or record grievances reported by the beneficiaries. This delays feedback to the beneficiaries that creates feelings of unfairness and lack of accountability (Bukuluki Paul and Watson Carol, 2012).

Role conflict: There have been reports of ambiguity in the roles and responsibilities of the SAGE technical officers and the senior Community Development Officers, which has, in some instances, caused tensions between the two role-holders. This was revealed during a study conducted by Bukuluki and Watson (2012), where one key informant echoed the view of other study participants, confirmed that: *'There are conflicts between some local government staff and the technical officer, especially the role ambiguity between the SAGE technical officer and the senior CDO in charge of SAGE. In the guidelines, there is a clause that each is a counterpart to the other, but this is not clear and caused friction, especially at the beginning of the programme.'*

Lack of financial capacity: On the other hand, local governments perceive themselves as lacking the financial capacity to implement social protection programs such as SAGE. As such they lack motivation and are hesitant to think ahead and express demand for social protection financing through their own planning processes.

Inadequate participation in decision making process: Local Government is majorly involved at implementation level through the use of its structures and resources but less involved at decision making and planning level. Local governments are oriented on the implementation plan and strategies but play little or no role in planning for the programme. SAGE is not yet institutionalized which leaves a wider gap between SAGE unit and Local Government authority.

This affects decisions made especially in case a conflict arises. Much as SAGE is hosted and considered to be managed at the District level, less control exists in the local Government mandate. Its control is at the ESP secretariat level. The political authority play an oversight role in the SAGE program though, this arm of government has no powers to make decisions that can contribute to the management.

3.0. POLICY AND PROGRAMME IMPLICATIONS

Review local government staffing levels and build capacity: Local government, with its tiered structure from district to village level, operates effectively and has been used for implementation of government programmes, including the SCG. However, there needs to be a clear assessment of staff resources at each level. The onus for identifying and addressing staffing gaps at local government level lies with the Government. Programme management could be supported and improved through regular and ongoing targeted capacity-building and training programmes for local government staff. Providing on-going targeted capacity-building and training programmes for local government staff (including grievance handling, communications and feedback mechanisms, monitoring and evaluation).

Linkages: In addition, district local governments have been charged with establishing complementary linkages with SAGE in their memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development (MGLSD). Linking the SAGE programme to other services and programmes is expected to increase uptake of those services and programmes by beneficiaries beyond what is likely to occur without any active coordination or efforts to build linkages.

Social accountability: This can be done through improving transparency and accountability mechanisms at the local government levels. For example, this can be done through publically displaying lists of beneficiaries identified for the SAGE programme on public notice boards and pay points. The local governments should also continuously sensitize the beneficiaries their rights and responsibilities as well as translating the citizen charters into local languages. In addition, the local governments should create avenues through which NGOs and media participate in the implementation of the SAGE programme for example through monitoring of the programme as well as participation in channeling the grievances and following-up on the feedback which enhance accountability and also ensures oversight of frontline actors at local government structures.

Mainstreaming of SAGE programme: Through the institutionalization of programme into local government plans and budgets. Local governments should incorporate SAGE objectives into the district performance management system; review periodic progress and financial reports on programme implementation prepared by ESP Secretariat and monitor implementation of SAGE in the district to ensure adherence to plans and procedures and attainment of programme objectives. These will create ownership and sustainability of the programme. The local governments should also adopt certain mechanisms that are relevant for other social

protection programmes such as supporting the institutionalization of the birth and death registration system as a basis for assessing the eligibility of individuals and households, and support the enrollment of eligible beneficiaries.

Strengthen inter-stakeholder coordination: There is need to strengthen the role of the local governments in coordination and information sharing among government and non government social protection actors (organisations) particularly at the lower local government and community levels to avoid duplication and wastage of resources.

4.0. CONCLUSION

The participation of local governments is very vital in the implementation of social protection programmes specifically SAGE for the case of Uganda. This is mainly because the local government structures form major arm for public service delivery in a relatively efficient and cost-effective way at the lower levels. The local governments have certain advantages over other arms of the government such as the proximity near the communities which to some extent explains the sustainability of the programmes in some instances. In addition the local government system in Uganda with its extensive local council structures and the already existing administrative infrastructures add value to the implementation of social protection programmes. These make it easy in identifying and mobilization of beneficiaries, delivering and monitoring the programmes over other government arms. In addition, working with the local governments creates ownership and trust of the services by the beneficiaries. In order to strengthen the capability of local governments, there is need for capacity building and empowering the already existing administrative infrastructures with equipments and facilities necessary for public service delivery.

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