

Graduating from Extreme Poverty into a Sustainable Livelihood: A Case Study of LEAP programme in the Kpandai District, Ghana.

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Abstract

This paper examines the policy and the implementation gaps of the LEAP program in tackling poverty sustainably in Ghana. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect empirical data from respondents by using purposive sampling to collect data from the Social Welfare Department, Ministry of Gender and Social Protections through interviews, District LEAP Implementation Committee Members, and administering of questionnaires and conducting Focus Group Discussions to LEAP beneficiaries in the Kpandai district of northern, Ghana. The key findings from this research reveals a lot of shortcoming such as; political pressure to add more beneficiaries amidst budgetary constraints, inefficacious of the LEAP programme in its current form as far as sustainable poverty alleviation is concern. Subsequently, this paper proposed the graduation module as an alternative strategy of alleviating people from the quagmire of extreme poverty into sustainable livelihoods.

Keywords: LEAP; sustainable poverty reduction; graduation; Kpandai.

1. INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a global phenomenon confronting all countries globally but the level of poverty and squalor in third world countries is evasive and quite alarming (Barrientos, 2011, Kates, 2018, Baro and Deubel, 2006, Fosu, 2015, Group, 2014). As a result of this phenomenon, majority of people in developing countries are caught up in the quagmire of poverty and deprivation (Quisumbing and Pandolfelli, 2010, Shujie et al., 2004). Present and successive governments and development partners have been devising and crafting policies and programs to arrest this number one 'enemy' (poverty) of humanity, to reverse societies on the path of development and prosperity.

Though there have been remarkable improvements and gains in the fight against poverty globally. However, the gains so far chalked in sub Saharan Africa is below average (World Bank Report, March 2016). This could be attributed to several factors which includes bad governance, weak institutional capacity, corruption as a result of lack of accountability, poor policy design and policy implementation which leads to unfulfilled policy gaps are but some of the factors that undermines poverty reduction in Africa (Beegle et al., 2016, Castañeda et al., 2016)

As a result of these, there are glaring social correlates of underdevelopment –lack of sustainable social safety nets for highly vulnerable populations. Social inequalities and poverty continue to plague many third world countries today and will further delay the development of the late developers in the future if proper policies are not put in place to improve African economies. Hence, states need to roll out social protection regimes that are not only resilient but robust in eradicating poverty sustainably for the vulnerable population to promote inclusive growth and development.

Like other leaders around the world, African governments are instituting social protection systems to deal with poverty, vulnerability and deprivation. So that no one is left behind, making economic growth inclusive and prosperity a shared prosperity for all.

Drawing lessons from their Latin American, Asian counterparts and other peers in development globally, African governments towed the inclusive developmental paradigm through the adoption and implementation of Cash Transfer programs. The idea to replicate these programs as a photocopy approach to development in Africa is borne out of the success stories of countries like Mexico, Brazil, Honduras, Nicaragua, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Turkey, Cambodia among others (Fiszbein and Schady, 2009) as an effective social protection mechanism.

According to (Niño-Zarazúa et al., 2012) until the dawn of the 21st century, the common form of social protection for extremely poor and vulnerable groups in African countries were emergency food reliefs, clothing's and beddings in times of crises such as floods, pestilence, conflicts, droughts and other humanitarian emergencies.

However, in the last two decades, there is a paradigmatic shift from humanitarian assistance to a more institutionalized form of aid in the form of Cash Transfers to the poor, and vulnerable groups across most sub Saharan African countries (De Haan, 2014, Niño-Zarazúa et al., 2012) and so do Ghana. Cash transfer are

mainly focusing on poor households such as; children, orphans, widows, extremely disabled without productive capacity among other groups. Since cash transfer implementation in Africa over the past two decades various impact assessment reports borne out from evidence based research has cited a remarkable achievements of the various social protection mechanisms across Africa. For example, in Kenya Cash Transfer for Orphans, Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC) has increased real household consumption levels of recipients by 13% points, secondary school enrolment and retention also went up by 7 % (Mwasiaji, 2015) ,also evidence from impact evaluation of child support program in South Africa and Kenya CT-OVC showed that in addition to poverty reduction ,social protection through cash transfers contributes to addressing the economic drivers of HIV-AIDS behaviors among sexually active beneficiaries . Making cash transfers a sure way of using one stone in killing two birds .Thus poverty reduction for the poor and vulnerable on one hand and as a critical component of an integrated HIV/AIDS response reduction mechanism on the other hand. Although, the use of cash transfer for poverty mitigation in most countries is limited to rural and deprived geopolitical regions and districts which suffer the double jeopardy of deprivation and vulnerability ,its overall multiplier effect on investment and contribution to poverty reduction especially in less developed countries is enormous.

The Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty is one of the pro- poor policies which forms part of the broader social protection policy of government of Ghana, in addressing extreme poverty. Since its inception, it has chalked some success as far as reducing extreme poverty is concern among vulnerable groups. However, according to (Jaha and Sika-Bright, 2015) on the impact of LEAP, chronicled a lot of challenges such as insufficient amount of cash transferred to beneficiaries, lack of complimentary services and irregular payment to beneficiaries which serves as a barrier to the smooth implementation of the program. However, beyond these hindrances as posited by these researchers there are some inherent implementation problems in the LEAP program, such as increasing number of beneficiaries are being hooked on the programme. Political pressure by lobbyist to add more constituencies on the beneficiary district is putting a huge financial burden and suffocating the fiscal space to deliver on other social interventions programs. These are serious political economy questions worth consideration on its sustainability.

Also, most social protection programs in Africa are typically championed by non-governmental organizations and development partners, fully or partially funded by donor with states governments at best fronting these organization in implementation (Niño-Zarazúa et al., 2012, Garcia and Moore, 2012).This reveals a weak political commitment with precarious, medium- to- long term sustainability and policy ownership should donor support fold, most Cash Transfer programs in Africa will collapse . This fears permeates the LEAP policy in Ghana. This and many other predictive analyses and sign post warrants a re-look on the policy document to implement the graduation module. This research seek to offer that alternative by showing the efficaciousness of the graduation module as an integrated response to sustainable poverty reduction strategy.

1.2 Ghana's Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP)

Drawing inspiration from the Latin American and some African countries on the potency and efficacy of Cash Transfers as a poverty fighting strategy, the government of Ghana implemented a flagship program dubbed 'Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP). Ghana's LEAP was launched in 2008 under the larger social protection policy in Ghana. The LEAP program provides cash transfer to extremely poor households with orphans, vulnerable children, persons with extreme disability without productive capacity ,the elderly (65 years and above) (Holmes and Jones, 2010, Handa et al., 2013). It started on a pilot bases in about 21 districts with initial number of 1,654 beneficiaries in 2008 to almost one million people as at 2017. Primarily, the program seek to reduce poverty ,and encourage long term human development through the transfer of cash to the extremely poor and marginalized persons across the country (Debrah, 2013).The marginalized persons comprises the bottom 10% of the extremely poor according to 2014 Ghana standard of living survey. The main focus of LEAP is to aimed at positioning the extremely poor to leap or jump out of the quagmire of poverty by empowering them to spur up their livelihood in a sustainable manner to promote socio economic empowerment through inclusive growth to reduce economic inequalities .

Since the implementation of the LEAP program for the past ten (10) years ,a lot of studies and researches have been conducted employing several methodologies (Oduro, 2015). However, most of these studies upon a careful analysis by the researcher, is concentrated on the impact of LEAP on health, school enrolment and attendance ,improved nutrition ,local economic improvement and other multiplier effects to beneficiaries ,and local economic stimulation in general .Despite, the positive effects of LEAP program as evidence by the impact assessment researchers about the success of the program in Ghana ,there are reasons to be cautious about some of the overblown claims advanced in favour of the LEAP program in Ghana .According to Ghana Statistical Service (2016/17) poverty still remained a rural phenomenon in Ghana with the rural savannah ranking highest with increasing poverty rates. Again 26% of all persons where found in the three northern regions of Ghana. Thus northern region, Upper East and the Upper West contributing about 40% to national poverty. Poor persons in Ghana

Year	Number of poor persons	Number of extreme poor
2017	6.8 million	2.4 million
2013	6.4 million	2.2 million
2006	7.0 million	3.6 million

Source:(Service, 2014).

The data above shows that despite the implementation of the cash transfer program since 2008 .Extreme poverty still rear its ugly head especially in the three savannah regions of the north. The high poverty levels is exacerbated due to poor infrastructure, lack of social amenities and economic opportunities .Which further leads to social exclusion of citizens thereby widening the gap between the rich and poor. These worrying phenomenon calls for interrogation of efficaciousness of various pro-poor policies implemented over the years for poverty reduction in Ghana using the LEAP programme as a test case.

There are some inherent policy and implementation gaps in the (LEAP) programme in Ghana which needs restructuring towards implementing a robust, and sustainable poverty alleviation program in synergy with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These shortfall are;

1. Generally, Cash transfers programs in most developing countries are struggling with sustainability issues amidst dwindling fiscal space due to slow economic growth. Ghana's LEAP is not immune from these teething problems.
2. Again, Cash Transfers programs have attracted criticism mainly due to the narrow means of targeting and the failure to tackle poverty and inequality sustainably in the long term (Barrientos and DeJong, 2004) .Evidence on the impact of the first generation Cash Transfer programs like the Ghanaian parallel shows mixed results. Good outcomes with respect to food consumption, school enrolment, and medical attendance were found (Fiszbein and Schady, 2009) but a more careful analyses beyond superficiality, raises eyebrows about the quality of those services enjoyed by the beneficiaries.
3. Qualitative variables like (e.g. learning outcomes and quality of health care enjoyed by Cash Transfer beneficiaries are of poor qualities (Fiszbein and Schady, 2009) This is evidenced by the deteriorating health care delivery system in Ghana under the NHIS system, and the poor performance of students in public basic schools especially in rural areas where beneficiary's children/wards are mostly enrolled across Ghana.
4. Another area of concern, is targeting errors, most CT programs in Africa face. Which erodes the noble objectives of the program, a sizeable number of the beneficiaries are not supposed to be on the program (Amarante and Brun, 2016) which raises issues about transparency, accountability and political manipulation ,likewise the LEAP in Ghana. Targeting and control monitoring mechanisms have revealed political patronage, corruption and leakage of benefits ((Ansell and Mitchell, 2011).

Electoral pressure regarding the extension of the cash transfer programs and the potential implication for fiscal sustainability are serious political economy questions worth considerations .This, have been raised elsewhere in several analyses (Barrientos& Villa, 2015).

Per the LEAP policy document and implementation road map, beneficiaries are supposed to exit or wean off (graduate) from the program so that they can be on their own. This policy model is novel because no country can fight poverty sustainably by sharing cash to poor people. Since the implementation of the LEAP in 2008 it appears beneficiaries hardly exit or graduate from the program .The number of beneficiaries keep ballooning and development experts are beginning to raise doubts about the efficacy of cash hand out as a sustainable poverty fighting strategy.

All these ills and challenges militating against Cash Transfer programs in other jurisdictions, manifestly rear its ugly head in the Ghana's LEAP. In that apart we venture into an argument that LEAP modus operadi of stand-alone cash transfers is an unfinished agenda for poverty reduction, and a tinkering drop in the ocean of poverty. This therefore calls for a policy relook. It is against this motivation that this present study sought to investigate the performance and efficacy of the LEAP program in Ghana and proposed graduation model for sustainable poverty reduction. The rest of the paper is structured as follows: The next section covers the methodology of the study, results and discussion, conclusion and recommendations.

1.3 Theoretical background of the study

The theoretical perspectives that underpins the Graduation and Exit model. This models as a poverty alleviation strategy traces its roots or is based on the experiences of the BRAC project implemented in Bangladesh (Chowdhury and Bhuiya, 2004)in the 1990s. This module graduation approach combines elements of social protection and livelihoods development approach that seek to reduce inequality through skills training, and equipping of beneficiaries with micro entrepreneurial skills and agribusiness as a sustainable development for the future (Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux, 2011) .Although not a magic wand ,the graduation approach help by moving greater numbers of highly vulnerable households into sustainable livelihoods .It is not a stop gap escape from extreme poverty but instead seek to equip participants with tools, skills, livelihood and self-confidence to enable them migrate sustainable livelihoods.

There is a growing recognition among policy makers and development practitioners that, the extremely poor persons cannot emancipate themselves from the quagmire of poverty by relying solely on Cash Transfer programs (monetary handouts) alone. Their emancipation from poverty hinges on their integration and insertion into the larger economy through skills training and entrepreneurial ventures. In Chile such program known as the Programa Puente (The Bridge Program) support extremely poor families insertion into the larger economy through coordinated use of social safety nets cum other ancillary income generating activities worked well in reducing poverty sustainably. Other programs like Bolsa Familia in Brazil also seek to foster synergies with local development interventions and micro credit or business development .The implementation of these complementary services in conjunction with cash transfers programs is a novel way of fighting poverty sustainably and its efficacy is attested in several jurisdictions.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employed mixed methods of research thus qualitative and quantitative methods in unearthing some of the policy and implementation gaps in the LEAP program. The researchers obtained data through primary and secondary sources using the purposive sampling technique to select departmental heads and other agencies that are involved in the management and administering of the cash transfer under the LEAP Program in Ghana. The Primary data comprised of an in -depth interviews with six (6) program officers of LEAP, and district oversight and three (3) LEAP implementation Committee Members, administering of 50 questionnaires to LEAP beneficiaries in selected communities in the two implementation districts .The secondary data included desk review of literature on cash transfer programs across time and space, government and civil society organization publications on the LEAP program , and other publications on antipoverty programs in Africa.

2.1 Study Area;

The study was conducted in kpondai in the northern region of Ghana. The Poverty Mapping Report for the district (Cooke et al., 2016) shows high prevalence of poverty in the kpondai district. 76.7 % of the people are declared poor. It is ranked as the third poorest district out of all the 25 districts in the northern region of Ghana. Again, the district ranked third in terms of number of poor persons with about (82,712) after Bole district and East Gonja districts respectively. For the purpose of this study nine (9) communities were selected namely Nkanchina No, 1 Ogegrege, Buya, Balai.Onyumbu, Bankamba, Kojoboni, Jagrido and Nbowura these communities were purposively selected per the district poverty profile, they are communities with increasing number of orphans, and vulnerable populations.

2.2 Participants; in this study the sampling frame was obtained from the kpondai District Social Welfare Department register of LEAP beneficiaries. This register contains the communities and their respective household and beneficiaries that benefit from the leap program. From this sample frame, the communities and their respective households' were randomly selected to constitute the sample size.

3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS.

Table 1.1 Ages of respondents

Ages of respondents	Frequency	Percent
1-16 years	6	12
16-32 years	2	4
33-48 years	14	28
49-64 years	4	8
65 and above	23	46
Total	50	100

Source: field survey, 2018

From the table above it can be seen clearly that 6 of the respondents representing 12 % were between the ages of 1-16 years, 2 of them representing 4% were between the ages of 16-32 years, then 14 of them representing 28% were between the ages 33-48 years, 4 of them representing 8% were between the ages of 49-64 years and 23 of them representing 46% were 65 and above years. This means that majority of the LEAP beneficiaries are aged person 65 and above years.

Table1.2 Awareness of skills training and exiting.

Question	Frequency	Percent
I am aware of the skills training	11	22
I am not aware of any skills training	39	78
Total	50	100

Source: field survey, 2018

The respondents again were asked, if they are supposed to undergo skill training to make themselves self-reliant under the LEAP programme 11 of them representing 22 % said they were aware, 39 of them representing 78% said they were not aware of skills training. This implies that majority of the beneficiaries think they will be on the program in perpetuity. Looking at the increasing number of beneficiaries being hooked on the program, fiscal sustainability of the program is in doubt should donor support fold as evidenced in Mozambique (Cliff, 1993).

Table1.3 : Skills training for beneficiaries under the LEAP program.

Question	Frequency	Percent
No training is organized	33	66
We are not aware of any skills training	17	34
Total	50	100

Source: field survey, 2018

The respondents were further asked , since they were selected as a beneficiary to the LEAP program, have they undergone some form of skills training aimed at making them self- employable ,33 of them representing 66% said no training is organized, 17 of them representing 34% said they are not aware of any skills training programme. This means that most of the respondents have not undergone any training or skills for self-employment and a good number of them are not even aware of any skills training. This call for implementation of cash transfer programs contemporaneously with skills and entrepreneurial training to empower ultra-poor persons as a sustainable poverty fighting strategy. For example in Bangladesh micro credit and agribusiness training are run concurrently for cash transfer beneficiaries as an integrated response to sustainable poverty reduction(Fiszbein and Schady, 2009)

Table 1.4: What will be your economic state if you are exited from the LEAP without alternative livelihood?

Question	Frequency	Percent
I will move back to my status quo of extreme poverty	45	90
It will not affect my family and finances	5	10
Total	50	100

Source: field survey, 2018

The respondents were asked that, should they be exited on the LEAP program today, how they will fend for themselves and their dependents 45 of them representing 90% said it will affect their ability to care for their families. Only five 5 representing 10 % said it will not affect them much. This implies that majority of the respondents responded that they will move back to their status quo of extreme poverty if they exit on the LEAP program today. This implies that the LEAP program in its current form is not a sustainable poverty fighting strategy since beneficiaries are likely to move back into their status of extreme poverty. This happened in several jurisdiction where cash transfers were unilaterally implemented without empowering poor people to exit sustainably (Slater, 2011, Farrington and Slater, 2006).

Table 1.4: should cash transfer programs be compliment with skills training.

Question	Frequency	Percent
That will make us self-reliant after exiting the program	40	80
The cash transfers alone is enough	10	20
Total	50	100

Source: field survey, 2018

Talks about whether cash hand out given should be compliment with skills training for self- employability. 40 of them representing 80 % said yes, that will make us self-reliant after exiting the program, 10 of them representing 20% said cash transfer alone is not a measure to help exit them extreme poverty to sustainable livelihood. This emphatically shows that most of the respondents' believe that cash hand out given should be compliment with skills training for self- employability.

The qualitative research findings below are tailored in line with the objective of the study.

The core mandate of the LEAP is to empower the extremely poor and vulnerable groups to enable meet their basic needs while simultaneously acquiring skills training, and transfer of productive assets to engage in income generating activities .With medium- to -long term aim of moving the poor and vulnerable groups out of extreme poverty to sustainable livelihood. This noble objective is in sync with international benchmarks of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which has set a global framework for mitigating poverty sustainably.

However, this research findings confirms that ,since the inception of the program in Kpandai since 2010 ,beneficiaries have not undergone any skills training to put them on alternative livelihood ,should the program fold, the beneficiaries are afraid they will reverse to their status quo of extreme poverty. A participant in the (FGD)

“If I have additional livelihood and the program stops, I can live on my own independently, if there is a training

I will opt for animal rearing. I hear piggery rearing is lucrative”

Also, per the finding from this research the LEAP beneficiaries have not been able to acquire any major productive livelihood assets. The amount received is too meagre to be used for any productive or business activity. This findings confirms other research works (Dabuo, 2018, Handa and Park, 2012, Peprah et al., 2017) . This from ‘hand to mouth transfer’ they christened cannot enable beneficiaries to acquire any productive asset to generate an alternative income to enable them literally ‘leap’ from dependency into sustainable livelihood.

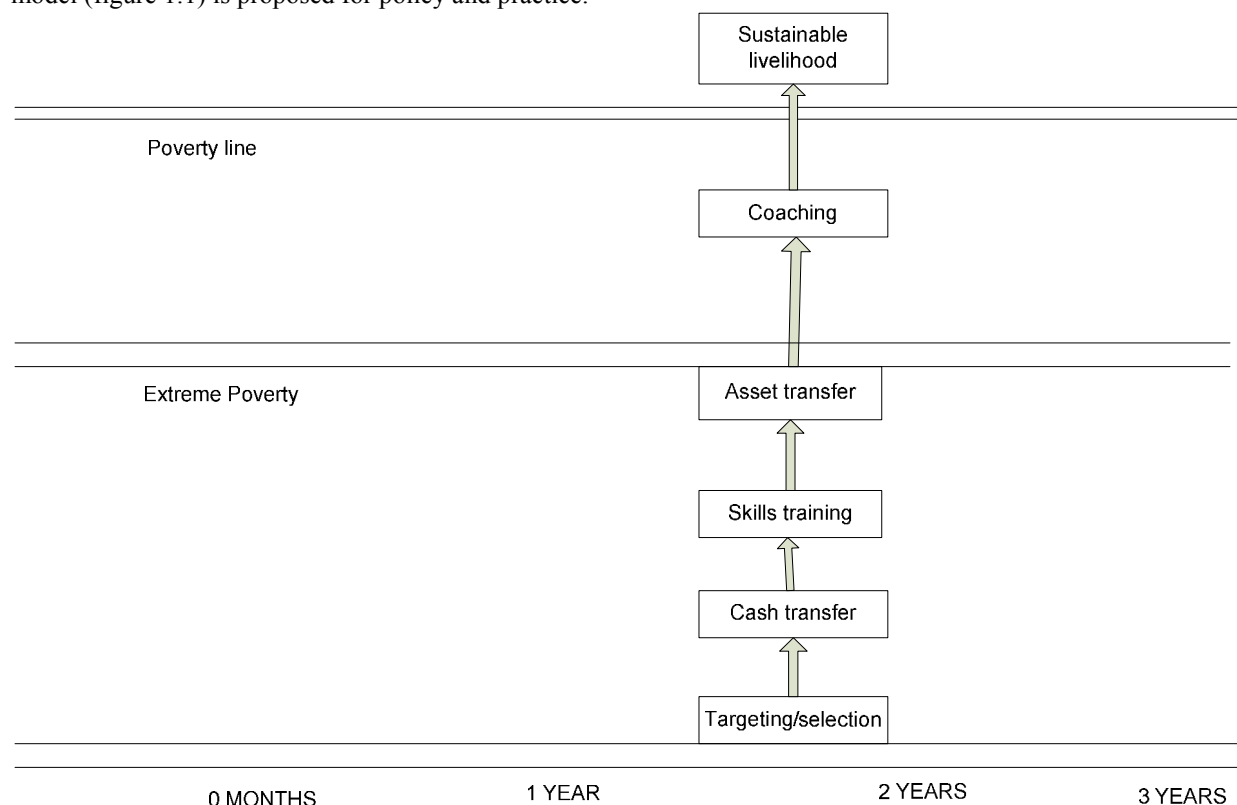
“Last month the money I collected all was used to pay my daughters medical bills. Though we are covered on NHIS but most of the drugs prescribed were not in the hospital. I have to purchase in a private pharmacy shop. The amount given is too small.”

“Alternative livelihood is important because it will enable us rake in more income...,some of us borrow money in anticipation of the LEAP grants in times of financial hardship .But alternative source of generating income will put us on the path of independence.” Filtered from FGD at (Bankanba community)

Though the World Bank reports that LEAP is reaching the poorest households, and there are records of marginal gains in extreme poverty reduction and improved livelihoods among beneficiaries .Not discounting the spillover effects to non-beneficiaries .Notwithstanding these modest gains ,there are deficiencies in the LEAP program in its current form .The unilateral transfer of cash without exploring any other alternative economic livelihood activities to concurrently hook beneficiaries raises doubts on the efficacy of the LEAP to sustainably mitigate poverty (Handa et al., 2013).By inference any poverty reduction program that does not factor in the empowerment of its beneficiaries with medium -to -long term vision of weaning them is not a sustainable poverty reduction strategy and so do LEAP in Ghana.

Therefore, this paper calls for building a more comprehensive social protection system that is resilient, and homegrown which is synergistically tied to skills training and micro enterprise management skills to graduate poor persons and put them on the path of self-reliance in line with global benchmarks of the Sustainable Development Goals. Until then, Ghana’s LEAP in its current form is a tinkering drop in to the ocean of poverty and at best a mere window dressing attempt to poverty reduction.

Based on the deficiencies and shortcomings associated with the LEAP in reducing poverty sustainably, this model (figure 1.1) is proposed for policy and practice.



Adapted and modified
 Graduation model

Notes:

- Targeting: to ensure that only poorest households are selected into the LEAP program devoid of

- political manipulation and cronyism.
- Cash Transfer: the selected beneficiaries are put on cash transfer to enable them meet their basic consumption need.
- Skills and Entrepreneurial Training: to learn trade or vocation and to how to manage trade work and small business enterprises
- Assets Transfer: of in-kind good (such as livestock e.g. goats ,piggery, rabbits and other agribusiness ventures) or any other business ventures depending on the economic viability or vocational needs of the area in question to help them start a sustainable economic activity. With the aim of their full insertion into the large economy with medium to long term deliverable and milestones
- Coaching: offered by combination of experts such as extension officers, veterinary officers, and experts within small scale business management and social and networking skills.
- Graduation: final graduation into sustainable livelihood and integration into the larger economy.

The incorporation of this Gradation Module in the LEAP program will help offer beneficiaries who are strong the opportunity to undergo skills training, lump sum /productive asset transfer as a startup, coaching, social network and market linkages, final graduation (weaning off) into sustainable livelihood.

However, one key limitation of this graduation module is such that it should be selective by disallowing certain groups of persons with the following demographic characteristics: the extremely disabled persons without productive capacity, dysfunctional households, and the elderly. These category of persons will enjoy the cash transfers only. This sorting is based solely on these group of persons in capabilities to engage in other economic activities due to their conditions hence must not be misconstrued to mean discrimination and social exclusion.

This module will offer LEAP beneficiaries enough shock absorbers to withstand economic stress with little possibility of falling back into extreme poverty because of its resilience in poverty reductions in other jurisdictions. For example in Chile, Bangladesh, Rwanda, Peru and South Africa have implemented the graduation modules which has helped reduced poverty sustainably (Chowdhury and Bhuiya, 2004). However, the graduation module should be complemented with broader social protection mechanism because the extremely poor on their way towards becoming micro- entrepreneurs need supporting infrastructure like good roads, irrigation facilities, linkages to markets, extension services in place. Again, the access to land and overall inclusive economic growth are necessary conditions that can facilitate the migration of the poor households into sustainable livelihoods. And lack of it thereof will militate against the concept of graduation .This implies that, the gradation program is not stand alone concept .Programs of this kind also require access to affordable but quality health services since any economic progress can be swept away by single health sock with their families and dependents. Hence early grandaunts should continue to enjoy selective social protection interventions until they are fully anchored financially before full graduation.

4. Conclusion and Policy Recommendation

This article has examined the efficaciousness of the LEAP program (Cash Transfer program) in mitigating poverty sustainably in Ghana. Though, the LEAP has choked marginal gains in mitigating poverty among the ultra-poor in meeting their basic needs, its efficacy to sustainable poverty reduction remains minimal. Ghana's social protection programs are heavily dependent on donor support, cash hand out given to beneficiaries without skills training and entrepreneurial ventures. Social protection policies should not just rely on short term achievements but take a spatial view going forward on social protection policies in Ghana. This will not only help knowing the program achievements and shortfalls of LEAP but could be a springboard to trigger technocratic rethinking aimed at building a nationally owned social protection system which is anchored on empowering poor people relating to skills training, asset transfer and other ancillary services to integrate the poor into the larger economy in a sustainable manner.

Therefore, this paper calls for building a more comprehensive social protection system that is resilient, and homegrown which is synergistically tied to skills training and micro enterprise management skills to graduate poor persons and put them on the path of self-reliance in sync with global benchmarks of the Sustainable Development Goals. Until then, Ghana's LEAP in its current form is a tinkering drop in to the ocean of poverty and at best a mere window dressing attempt to poverty reduction.

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