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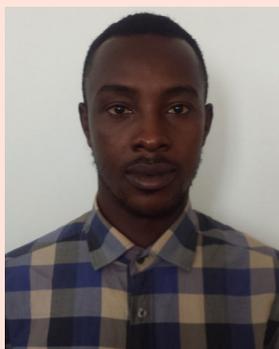
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GEOGRAPHY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Does the Ghanaian livelihood empowerment against poverty programme lead to an increase in household productive livelihood assets? Analysing the Ashanti scenario

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Abstract: This study draws evidence from 180 respondents who were beneficiaries of the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme with the underpinning objective of whether the LEAP beneficiaries are able to acquire other productive livelihood assets. Descriptive research involving both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. The study used questionnaires and focus group discussions to obtain data from the respondents. Data were analysed using the descriptive statistics from the SPSS version 17.0 and presented by tables and percentage counts. The study found that the LEAP beneficiaries do not have other preferable productive livelihood assets needed to expand their livelihood options, largely due to the low amount paid coupled with irregularity of payment. The paper therefore recommends that there should be empowerment of beneficiaries with productive capacities through the incorporation of skills and capability development into the programme. This will enhance beneficiary households to initiate new or strengthen old livelihood sources to ensure livelihood sustainability. Moreover, enrolling the LEAP beneficiaries' caregivers who are not working in a skilled training



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Prince Peprah holds a BA in Geography and Rural Development and currently a Teaching and Research Assistant at the Department of Geography and Rural Development, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. His research interests include poverty reduction studies, livelihoods security and sustainability, sustainable development, waste management and climate variability/change impacts and rural people's livelihoods and coping/adaptive strategies.

The authors of this paper form a team of upward researchers who jointly articulate the LEAP effects on livelihood assets in Ghana. In this paper, the authors present how the LEAP has affected beneficiaries livelihood assets coupled with alternative livelihood source(s) in Ghana.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Many people in Ghana continue to battle with issues of poverty. It is envisaged that through social protection programmes via cash transfers may economically empower the poor with productive livelihood assets, to enable them move out of extreme poverty. In spite of its long standing implementation in Ghana, limited research has been conducted to assess the impact of the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme on the acquisition of productive livelihood assets for the beneficiaries. Using interviewer-administered questionnaire and focus group discussion, this study tries to ascertain the performance of the LEAP on livelihood asset acquisition for poverty reduction. The study shows that the LEAP is unable to enhance productive livelihood assets acquisition, largely due to the low amount paid coupled with irregularity of payments. The findings call for a critical evaluation of the LEAP programme to target the asset-based of beneficiaries which is key in poverty reduction.

programme that exists in communities to equip them with livelihood skills which can be used for livelihood activities, such as, baking and soap making will reduce beneficiaries' dependence on the LEAP cash.

Subjects: Social Sciences; Development Studies; Geography

Keywords: livelihood asset; LEAP; social protection; livelihood source

1. Introduction

Empirical research and investigation probing into poverty reduction and sustainable livelihoods in Ghana (Adjei, 2015; Asenso-Okyere, Nsowah-Nuamah, & Alberson, 1997; Boateng, Boakye-Yiadom, & Oduro, 2001; Oduro, 2001) and beyond (Barrientos, 2013; Chambers & Conway, 1992; Food & Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2008; Organization for Economic Co-operation & Development [OECD], 2009; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2005) document a strong correlation between asset acquisition and poverty reduction. In this regard, efforts meant to break the deadlock of poverty among the extremely poor, vulnerable and minority groups in general depend on access to livelihood assets, the diversity of the assets and the balance between the assets (FAO, 2008). The effort to promote asset acquisition among the poor and vulnerable has resulted in a global consensus on the need for comprehensive social protection intervention policies geared towards creating assets for the extremely poor to reduce their poverty and vulnerability.

Currently, social protection is grounded on the premise of basic rights of protecting the extremely poor and vulnerable. At the fore front of the recent embracement and crusade for social protection intervention as basic right as against the traditional charity approach where the poor and vulnerable, who are recipients of governments' support services consider themselves as privileged group, are international organisations including the International Labour Organization, World Bank and the United Nation (Matin & Hulme, 2003). The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2012) in its recommendation paper number (202) initiated the Social Protection Floor (SPF) to compel all member states to put in place a comprehensive and universal social protection programme geared towards the extremely poor and the vulnerable persons within societies. The ILO (2012) asserts that, social protection is a basic set of rights and transfers that provides and empowers all individuals within societies to access a minimum number of goods and services which should be defended by any decent society at any time (ILO, 2012). However, the common denominator linking all social protection interventions in the world, particularly, in developing countries have been the extension of cash transfer programmes. These provide cash benefits to the extremely poor and vulnerable persons and is believed to have strong positive impact on various dimensions of human development. Following the establishment of the Progresa/Oportunidades programme in Mexico, the first wave of cash transfer programme was intensified across the world and concentrated in Latin America (Barrientos, 2013; Fiszbein & Schady, 2009).

Cash transfers offer an important tool for risk management and asset accumulation to the vulnerable and poor at three levels. First, reducing the poverty emanating from shocks such as drought and sudden food increase; second, strengthening coping strategies and third, reducing vulnerability. They further demonstrated that, cash transfer has the ability to absorb the impact of shocks on people's livelihoods by energising all-encompassing economic activity and protect households by reducing the impact of shocks on productive assets to reduce vulnerability (OECD, 2009).

With this argument backing the need for social protection intervention programmes, the intensified commitment for the implementation of social protection intervention policies directed towards relieving affected citizens who are hovering in extreme poverty in recent times by successive governments from 2000 onwards cannot be however considered as a misapprehension in Ghana. This is particularly important as Ghana is a member of the leading organisations championing for universal social protection intervention programmes, and a party to several international instruments that have been stipulated to guide the protection of the extremely poor and vulnerable.

This non-compromising stance taken by the country has been manifested instrumentally in the implementation of the LEAP which is the flagship programme of the country's national social protection strategy. In line with the rights-based approach to social protection interventions benefits, the LEAP policy document spelt out that, "by all indications, the time is right in Ghana to pursue a more structured and more equitably distributed social protection programme, based on rights-based principles" (Ministry of Manpower, Youth & Employment [MMYE], 2007).

The LEAP is mainly a cash transfer programme funded by the Government of Ghana and other international organisations (World Bank and United Nations International Children's Fund [UNICEF]) which targets the extremely poor and vulnerable households with at least one or a combination of the disadvantaged groups of elderly (65 years and above) without productive capacity, the severely disabled who cannot work or Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) (Handa et al., 2013; Ministry of Gender, Children & Social Protection [MGCSP], 2016; Oxford Policy Management [OPM], 2013). Cardinaly, the LEAP seeks to reduce poverty and encourage long-term human development through the transfer of financial asset (cash) to the poorest and most marginalised persons across Ghana (MMYE, 2007). Specifically, the marginalised persons comprise the bottom 10 per cent of the extremely poor who, according to the 2014 Ghana Living Standard Survey, comprise approximately 2 million of the country's total population (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2014). It aims at positioning the extremely poor to leap out of extreme poverty and ultimately empowers them to ensure their livelihood sustainability in order to contribute to the socio-economic development of the country through assets acquired from the LEAP programme (MGCSP, 2016). Having been in existence since 2008, the programme has enrolled over 146,074 beneficiaries with bi-monthly payments ranging from GH¢ 48 to GH¢90 depending on the number of beneficiaries in the household (MGCSP, 2016).

Since the inception of the LEAP programme implementation for over eight years, copious research studies and evaluations have been carried out on the LEAP employing a range of methods (Agbaam & Dinbabo, 2014; Handa et al., 2013; Oduro, 2014; OPM, 2013; Thorne et al., 2014; UNICEF's, 2013). However, from these major rigorous studies, it can be observed that much of the research efforts have concentrated basically on the LEAP impacts on school enrolment and attendance, basic food needs, healthcare accessibility, local economic development and its effect on social network relationship.

Prominently missing from the accumulated studies is the impact of the LEAP cash transfer programme on beneficiary's ability to acquire other productive livelihood assets given its centrality in the poverty reduction process. In its rigorous and exciting Ghana country case study report on the LEAP, OPM (2013) partly discussed the LEAP's impact on beneficiary productive livelihood asset base.

This has served as a motivation for the present paper to solicit response from the beneficiaries to whom the programme was implemented, on how the LEAP has impacted on beneficiary productive livelihood assets base for alternative livelihood source(s). With the LEAP programme geared towards empowering beneficiaries through cash transfer, it is expedient to ascertain whether beneficiaries are able to utilise their bimonthly grants in acquiring other productive livelihood assets. Thus, a better understanding of the state of the LEAP's impact on beneficiary productive livelihood assets is crucial to determine how sustainable beneficiary livelihoods are and when beneficiaries are able to move out of extreme poverty.

2. Methods and data

2.1. Study design and context

The study espoused a mixed method approach in six LEAP implementing communities within Mampong and Asante-Akim Central Municipalities in the Ashanti Region, Ghana. The qualitative approach uses words and critical observations to express a reality describing people in ordinary

situations (Golafshani, 2003). The researchers used the qualitative method because of the need for a complex and detailed understanding of the issue. Access to this detail can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature (Kurfi, 2010). Sundong (2005) argues that the quantitative approach on one hand is a strong research tool that calls for maximum trust in numbers that equally depicts opinions or concepts. The quantitative method was used because it provided the numbers and figures while the qualitative method added value to the research through explanation from the respondents. Similarly, the qualitative method enabled the researchers to be involved in the data collection process by offering them the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the problem to be studied (Sundong, 2005). The body of studies undertaken to investigate the impact of the LEAP programme either utilised the qualitative approach (Handa et al., 2013; Oduro, 2014; OPM, 2013; UNICEF, 2013) or the quantitative approach (Agbaam & Dinbabo, 2014; Thorne et al., 2014). Henceforth, combining both approaches helped the researchers to provide stronger evidence for conclusion through collaboration of findings and a combination of different methods. The use of the two designs act as a check and balance against bias and generalisation of results (Ary & Jacobson, 2008). Mampong Municipality is located on longitudes 0.05° and 1.30° W and latitudes 6.55° and 7.30° N and bounded to the South by Sekyere south district, the east by Sekyere Central and the North by Ejura Sekyeredumase districts covering a total land area of 449 km², housing a population of 88,051 (Mampong Municipal Assembly, 2015), whereas the Asante-Akim Central Municipality is located in the eastern part of the Ashanti Region and lies between Longitude 00° 15' W and 10° 20' W and latitude 6° 30' N and 7° 30' N. It share boundaries with Asante Akim North District at the North, Ejisu-Juaben and Sekyere East at the West, Asante Akim South at the East and South, covering a total land area of 330 km², which harbours 71,508 inhabitants with agriculture serving as the main source of livelihood for majority of the population (Asante-Akim Central Municipal, 2015). The issues of poverty and vulnerability in the municipalities are visible and have great effects on the disadvantaged groups of men, children, women and people with disabilities. Female household heads could be said to be poorer than men, while women and the youth in urban setting seem to cope better with poverty than their men and rural counterparts who depend solely on agriculture. Mampong and Asante-Akim Central were therefore deemed appropriate and ideal locations for the study owing to the municipalities vast experience with regard to the LEAP programme as the programme started with them. With this, the impact of the LEAP on the beneficiaries in the municipalities can be assessed given their number of years they have spent on the programme.

2.2. Sample selection

The study used two different sampling techniques. In the first stage, purposive sampling method was used to select the study areas in general. Since the study was case specific, thus districts in which the LEAP is being implemented was needed. Hence, Mampong and Asante-Akim Central municipalities were selected. Specific study communities within the municipalities were selected using simple random technique as blindfolded person picked from a pool of LEAP implementing communities provided by the Social Welfare Departments in the municipalities. In all, six communities were picked randomly without replacement namely; Mampong, Bosofour, Mpirim and Odumasi, Konongo and Petriansa from the Mampong and Asante-Akim Central Municipalities respectively. Overall, 180 respondents from different households who were themselves beneficiaries of the programme were selected for the study with a total number of 90 beneficiaries from each municipality. Out of this total number, 30 respondents were selected from each community within the municipalities. Thus, equal opportunity was given to both Municipalities to ensure fair representation. The purpose of the study was explained to the respondents to obtain their consent before participating in the study.

2.3. Study instruments and data collection procedure

Interviewer-administered questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data, while focus group discussion was used to obtain qualitative data. Interviewer-administered questionnaire was used for the study owing to the high illiteracy rate among the respondents. Items of the questionnaire were therefore read out in the local dialect, *Twi*, to the respondents and their responses were

recorded. The focus group discussion, which form the qualitative part of the study supported the study through thorough explanation given on issues by the participants. Two focus group discussions were conducted, one in each Municipality at the Municipal Assemblies conference room with the participants sharing their experiences among themselves about the LEAP programme. Responses from the participants at the focus group discussions were both tape recorded and audio recording notes taken approach. These instruments helped to obtain in-depth responses on the subject matter of the study. Secondary information were also sourced from journal articles and official documents retrieved from the LEAP officials.

2.4. Data management and analysis

Data were subjected to rigorous validation checks to obtain clean data in order to maintain the chronological responses of the respondents. Edited data were then entered into the SPSS version 17.0. Descriptive statistics were first performed to describe, show and summarise the data. Results were organised and presented in the form of pie charts, frequencies and percentage counts. To corroborate the quantitative data, the qualitative data were transcribed verbatim and analysed through content analysis supported with quotations.

3. Results

These results are based on the respondents' self-reported cases gathered by the researchers on the field. The findings generally focused on the background characteristics of the respondents and the LEAP's impact on the beneficiaries' productive livelihood assets and alternative livelihood source(s).

3.1. Sample demographic characteristics

Table 1 presents the background characteristics of the study respondents. In all, 180 respondents from different households who were beneficiaries of the LEAP partook in the study and completely filled up all the questionnaire items. Majority of the respondents were females (150, 83.3%), due to perhaps the gendered perspective of poverty and inequality in the study areas and the country as a whole and the intention of increasing women's access to and control over resources. Majority (117, 65%) of the study participants were the aged, usually above 60 years, which imply that they may not have any productive capacity. The monthly average income among beneficiaries was GHS10–50 with a range of household size of two to six. Also, one profound characteristic of the respondents was the low level of education as 66.7% had no formal education and a percentage of (123, 68.3%) were engaged in no form of occupation despite living in farming communities. The low level of beneficiaries income is actually mirrored by the absence of productive capacity by the respondents since majority were aged and had low educational level.

3.2. LEAP cash ability to provide livelihood assets for economic activity

The study found that majority of beneficiaries had not been able to acquire productive livelihood assets needed to engage in economic activities. A significant proportion (91%) reported that they did not have any meaningful livelihood assets for any economic activities, whereas only 9% reported that they been able to acquire productive livelihood assets such as land for farming through the LEAP (see Figure 1).

Various reasons were reported by the respondents to account for the non-acquisition of productive livelihood assets aside from the financial asset by beneficiaries. Respondents throughout the study continually attested that the LEAP has not enhanced their productive asset-base, but provides cash for subsistence. Participants explained their inability to acquire productive livelihood assets aside from the financial transfer to the limited cash received and the unpredictable payment schedules. Participants explained why they have not been able to acquire productive livelihood assets:

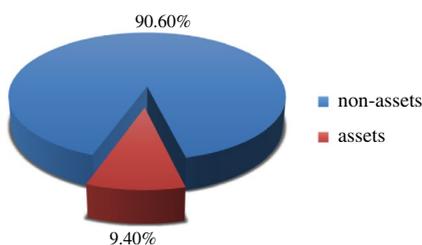
I am a widow with five children and received GH¢ 48 from the LEAP every two months. This is the only asset I receive from the LEAP. How can the whole household cope with such an amount? Sometimes getting a piece of land to farm on becomes difficult to acquire. (FGD participant, Bosofour).

Table 1. Sample characteristics of respondents

Sample characteristics of beneficiaries	Category	Frequency	Per cent
Gender	Male	30	16.7
	Female	150	83.3
	Total	180	100
Education	None	120	66.7
	Basic	55	30.6
	High	5	2.7
	Tertiary	0	0
	Total	180	100
Occupation	Peasant farming	50	27.8
	Petty trading	7	3.9
	None	123	68.3
	Total	180	100
Income	Between GHS 10–50	150	83.3
	Between GHS 51–100	21	11.7
	Above GHS 100	9	5
	Total	180	100
Household size	Minimum (2 person per household)	25	13.9
	Maximum (6 persons per household)	155	86.1
	Total	180	100
Age	10–20	3	1.6
	21–30	6	3.3
	31–40	14	7.8
	41–50	19	10.6
	51–60	21	11.7
	Above 60	117	65.0

Figure 1. LEAP cash ability to provide livelihood assets for economic activity.

Acquisition of asset by LEAP beneficiaries



Related to this, a male beneficiary from Patriensa had this to say:

What pains most is the mode of payment. We do not have a specific date for payment. Most of the times you will be waiting for the money to buy farm inputs but it will not come at the time it is expected. (FGD participant, Petriensa)

Importantly, the participants discussed the nature of the LEAP which makes it difficult to enhance the productive assets-base of beneficiaries for production in order to obtain diverse livelihood sources. The argument of the participants was entirely grounded on the assertion that the LEAP cash is basically for the provision of basic needs, such as, food for survival. Most of the participants described the

LEAP cash as very low, which cannot sufficiently meet the basic needs of their households as well as acquiring assets out of it:

With a household size of seven depending on GH¢48 every two months, how can this amount meet our basic needs at the same time enabling assets acquisition? (FGD participant, Konongo)

The LEAP programme does not provide skill and capacity enhancement programmes for those of us who are active and can work. Since we do not have any skill to engage in any economic activity, we always depend on the LEAP bi-monthly cash. (FGD participant, Odumasi)

Moreover, participants moved the emphasis to the acquisition of land as an asset and repeatedly explained the essence of owning lands in the study prefecture. Participants elucidated not only the economic value of land, but the social value attached to land ownership. Almost all the participants were living in communities where farming is the main economic activity of the population. In view of this, land for agricultural activity is vital for the socio-economic advancement of the people in general and the LEAP beneficiaries in particular:

I have been a beneficiary for 8 years but for assets such as common piece of land to even cultivate cassava, plantain and maize to feed my household, I do not have. (FGD participant, Petriensa)

The only asset I need urgently is land. Because, the only economic activity in this community is farming. So with land, I can cultivate crops such as maize and cassava to get additional income aside from the LEAP transfer. (FGD participant, Mpirim)

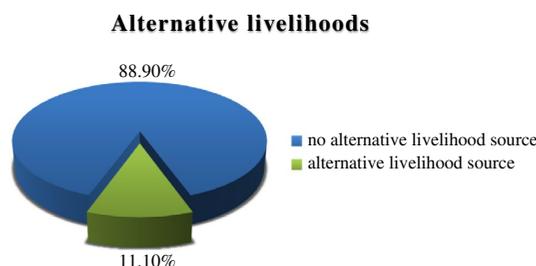
In this community, those without land are not given the needed respect. (FGD participant, Bosofour)

The reasons put forward by the beneficiaries as the inability of the LEAP cash transfer to provide livelihood assets for economic activity could also be inferred from the absence of productive of productive capacity (65%) among the study participants. Similarly, since most participants have not schooled enough (66.7%) to acquire skills useful for engaging in economic activities, they may have no alternative than to depend solely on the LEAP cash though they have productive capacity. Likewise, the large family size of the beneficiaries' could partly explain why the LEAP cash is not enough to provide livelihood asset for economic activities due to number of mouths to feed with the amount received bi-monthly.

3.3. Beneficiary's alternative livelihood source(s)

The study generally found that majority of the LEAP programme beneficiaries have no source of livelihood to depend on or survive aside from the bi-monthly transfers. A higher proportion of the study participants (89%) did not have additional livelihood source(s) whereas only approximately (11%) had alternative livelihood sources aside from the LEAP transfer (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Beneficiary's alternative livelihood source(s).



Respondents discussed pertinent issues that characterised the LEAP programme and as a result limited their potentials of obtaining additional livelihoods as beneficiaries. One important issue raised and discussed was the non-acquisition of assets such as lands to engage in productive livelihood activity. It is only natural for respondents to lament on the inability to acquire land to engage in livelihood activities since farming is the mainstay within the study prefecture. The limited amount coupled with irregular payment account for the low assets acquisition which offers beneficiaries handicapped in terms of additional livelihoods:

In terms of additional livelihood source aside from the LEAP cash, I do not have and moreover, I do not think I can have with this amount I receive which does not also come regularly. (FGD participant, Mpirim)

Also, a beneficiary from Odumasi noted:

With no lands for farming, how can I can get livelihood source apart from the LEAP cash because this community is basically a farming community. (FGD participant, Odumasi)

However, respondents showed the desire to obtain additional livelihoods aside from the LEAP cash transfer. This was found from the majority of participants who explained that, the LEAP cash is not reliable and sustainable. The unreliability and unsustainability of the LEAP cash is stemmed from the irregularity of its payment:

In fact, I wish to have additional livelihoods aside from the LEAP. (FGD participant, Mpirim)

Getting another source of income is essential. Because, it will add to the LEAP money of which I can use to afford farm implements. However, we cannot rely on this transfer since it is not regular and at times comes in instalments. (A fifty year old man, Mampong)

Also, interesting evidences were provided by the participants regarding why the LEAP cash is not reliable and sustainable to be depended wholly on for all beneficiary's needs. Participants envisaged the need for additional livelihoods aside from the LEAP cash transfer. A participant explained that having other livelihood serves as a security in case the LEAP stops:

When I have additional livelihood source, I can easily survive when the LEAP is not available. Things are not easy for us when the LEAP transfer delays since it is our only source of income. (A middle age widow, Petriensa)

Additional livelihood is important because it brings more income which helps in poverty reduction. (An old woman, Odumasi)

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that though participant expressed optimism at the prospect of obtaining additional livelihood assets as a means of easing their total dependence on the LEAP cash, majority of these respondents do not have productive capacity as they are aged (65%) thus, rendering them handicapped.

Other participants revealed their coping mechanisms when the LEAP cash transfer is not available, particularly when it delays. Majority of the participants spoke of borrowing, selling of limited available family asset, allowing their children to engage in child labour and migrating to assumed economic opportunities areas:

All I do is borrowing when the LEAP transfer is not available. I used the last transfer received for debt servicing. (A thirty-five year old man, Bosofour)

What I do when the money delays is to go to the forest with my children to gather firewood to sell. (A sixty-eight year woman, Mpirim)

I travel to Konongo to do galamsey in order to cater for my household. (A fifty-two year man, Petriensa)

Our findings have demonstrated beyond doubts that beneficiaries have not been able to acquire other productive assets for livelihood options expansion. The study findings also bring to bear factors such as the low amounts received which are not sufficient to acquire their most immediate assets, such as, lands for farming as they mostly reside in farming communities. Although the few with productive capacity do engage in other forms of livelihood activity such as gathering of fire wood to sell and travelling to a different destination for “galamsey” (illegal mining) activities, the majority without productive capacity as a result of their age are left at the mercy of the unreliable bi-monthly cash transfer.

4. Discussion

The global sustained interest in the elimination of extreme poverty and vulnerability as spelt out in the first goal of the Sustainable Development Goals has reflected in the implementation of social protection intervention programmes and policies, particularly in the developing countries which Ghana is not exempted (FAO, 2008). A number of programme interventions have been implemented in Ghana for a sustainable livelihood and poverty reduction. To find out how these pro-poor interventions have impacted on beneficiaries, the present study has analysed how the LEAP programme has enhanced beneficiaries’ asset-base to obtain additional livelihood source(s) for livelihood options expansion. For extreme poverty and vulnerability to be reduced, and a sustainable livelihood to be acquired, interventions should centre on empowering the poor and the vulnerable persons to build on their own opportunities and support their access to assets to acquire sustainable livelihood source (Chambers & Conway, 1992). Given the LEAP’s ultimate aim of empowering the extremely poor and vulnerable to move out of poverty, beneficiaries’ livelihood assets for alternative livelihood source is paramount to realise this overarching aim. On the beneficiaries’ livelihood assets, the study generally found that, the acquisition of other productive livelihood assets such as land, is not attainable by majority of the LEAP beneficiaries. However, people’s ability to move out of poverty depends largely on access to livelihood assets, because livelihoods are affected by both diversity and amount of productive assets individual possesses and these assets are sine qua non for livelihood sustainability and extreme poverty and vulnerability reduction (Adjei, 2015; Asenso-Okyere et al., 1997; Barrientos, 2013; Boateng et al., 2001; Chambers & Conway, 1992; FAO, 2008; Oduro, 2001; UNDP, 2005). The inability of the beneficiaries to acquire productive livelihood assets was attributed to the limited amount of cash received coalesced with irregular payment. The study findings are not different from other studies (Agbaam & Dinbabo, 2014; Handa et al., 2013; OPM, 2013; University of North Carolina & Institute of Statistical, Social & Economic Research, 2013). By implication, the value of the LEAP cash transfer may be too low to have a significant impact on other livelihood assets acquisition needed for engaging in an economic activity. Also, disturbingly, where payment intervals are particularly long, there is a likelihood of asset disinvestment to smooth and maintain basic needs consumption (OPM, 2013). This further keeps beneficiary households locked in a cycle of extreme poverty and vulnerability, unable to withstand future livelihood shocks. This plummet the essence of the LEAP cash transfer which seeks to protect and empower the extremely poor families consisting of the elderly (aged 65 and above), the disabled who are unable to work, and careers of Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) by providing them with financial support since the support is not enough (UNICEF, 2013). Interestingly, the study discovered that, majority of the beneficiaries did not have lands, which are regarded as the most basic and immediate asset for the rural poor. To this end, living in predominantly farming communities and without land for agricultural activities suggest a total dependence on the LEAP transfer. It was further revealed by the study that, land ownership in the study communities is attached with social recognition. Implicit from this is that, majority of the beneficiaries are not given the needed respect as well as excluded from social gatherings. This findings evict the earlier study by Handa and Park (2012). It can be deduced from the findings that the LEAP financial assets transferred to its beneficiaries have not been able to transcend to additional productive livelihood assets acquisition. With this evidence, the LEAP can be placed in the narrow view of social protection intervention which highlights social protection as a means of providing

relief to individuals and households to cope with shocks than a broader view which accentuates social protection as having both short term and long term roles in poverty reduction; helping people to conserve and accumulate assets and to transform their socio-economic relationships so that they are not constrained from seizing opportunities by bonding (Barrientos, 2013).

In a similar vein, the study encountered that preponderance of the beneficiaries have their livelihoods limited to the LEAP transfers and do not have additional livelihood source besides the cash transfers. They explained to be as a result of limited livelihood assets resulting from low amount of money received interfused with unpredictable payment schedules. Other reason that emerged as contributing to the inability of the beneficiaries to acquire additional livelihoods was the nature of the LEAP. It was explained that the LEAP is basically a cash transfer programme which does not transfer skills to beneficiaries to engage in preferable economic activity, but involves only cash transfer. Although the aim of the LEAP programme is to transfer cash to beneficiaries, it fails in its core mandate of providing a safety net for the poorest and most marginalised groups in the Ghanaian society, notably the bottom 20% (University of North Carolina & Institute of Statistical, Social & Economic Research, 2013). By inference, beneficiaries with no skill will continue to be unskilled and depend on the LEAP. Notwithstanding, livelihood interventions become significant when it empowers and provides diverse alternative livelihood activities which consist of providing both food and non-food items such as income necessary to acquire basic assets for economic activity outside the transfer (UNDP, 2005). Though the World Bank found that LEAP is reaching the poorest households (University of North Carolina & Institute of Statistical, Social & Economic Research, 2013), it fails at helping beneficiaries to obtain alternative that will reduce their dependence on the LEAP cash transfer. Alternative livelihood strategies also include protecting, replacing and rebuilding the productive assets needed to start a new livelihood activity but all these were missing among the beneficiaries. But the study found that almost all the beneficiaries who undertook part of the study depend entirely on the LEAP transfers. Arguing from the perspective of no additional livelihoods, it can be concluded that beneficiaries' livelihoods are not sustainable and reliable since the programme can be brought to an end. The study discovered that, as a result of no additional livelihoods, beneficiary households resort to borrowing money from neighbours and relatives to cope on a day-to-day basis as a coping strategy. This strategy is risky and has the tendency of further putting the beneficiaries into hardship when the LEAP cash arrives, due to the repayment of the borrowed monies. Also, LEAP beneficiaries are more likely to force their children to engage in child labour though it violates the LEAP conditionality of seeing to the enrolment and retention of school-age children in school (University of North Carolina & Institute of Statistical, Social & Economic Research, 2013), sell limited available family assets and in worst situation, migration becomes the last resort when the LEAP delays (OPM, 2013; Handa et al., 2013). Beneficiary households in all the study communities mentioned distress sale of limited family assets, such as lands when they faced risk. Such strategy of asset disinvestment has the ability of keeping the beneficiary households in long lasting poverty and vulnerability. Our findings contradict the briefing paper by University of North Carolina and Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (2013) that the LEAP cash transfer programme has had a significant impact both on beneficiaries and their families, especially in relation savings and investments, as well as on their wider communities particularly in terms of community development and economic growth. On the contrary, ILO (2015) noted that, aside from the Bolsa Familia cash transfer in Brazil, beneficiary households find alternative work in farms and small medium scale enterprises in addition to the cash transfer. This situation presents a glaring consequence of the reversal of range of social indicators including malnutrition, child labour, and low school turnout among beneficiary households when the LEAP cash is not available to be depended on.

The strengths of this study merit remarks. Our study was based in a prefecture of heterogeneous society with the highest number of LEAP beneficiaries, which typifies a multicultural and multi-ethnic groups were well represented. Besides, to the best of our knowledge, no study has been conducted to analyse the effect of the LEAP on beneficiaries' livelihood assets and alternative livelihoods source in Ghana. A sample size of 180 beneficiaries guaranteed that we included wide range of perspectives. Our study is not devoid of limitations too; hence the findings should be interpreted with prudence. The

fact that the study generally sourced its data from self-report by the respondents, recollect bias is ineludible. Also, there was an overrepresentation of females and underrepresentation of males relative to the study population. Notwithstanding, the gendered dimension of the LEAP programme can be responsible for such representation. The investigation was conducted with beneficiaries from two Municipalities, but inclusion of other districts could have conceivably resulted in changes in the findings. Strategies were designed to ensure validity of the study findings. A larger sample was used in order to secure representativeness and generalisability of the findings. Further studies are therefore needed in other LEAP communities to confirm the consistency of the present study findings.

5. Conclusion

This paper assesses the impact of the Ghanaian Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty programme on beneficiaries' productive livelihood assets and how they have been able to obtain additional livelihood source(s) aside from the LEAP cash transfers. This is key in the realisation of the programme's ultimate goal of empowering its beneficiaries to move out of extreme poverty and vulnerability. The study found empirical evidence that majority of the LEAP programme beneficiaries have not been able to acquire productive livelihood assets with the direct cash given to them bi-monthly. This perhaps can be attributed to the relatively low amounts received coupled with unpredictable payment schedules. The study additionally ascertains that the LEAP is unable to empower beneficiaries to acquire other productive livelihood assets aside from the cash transfers. As a result, the LEAP is breeding dependency and has drifted from being a short term intervention of equipping beneficiaries with the needed assets to expand their livelihood options.

6. Implications for policy

This study has implications for policy and practice. The findings are relevant to the social policy directions particularly towards the move to shape policy formulation and implementation by government and other policy makers and implementers involved in the LEAP programme. Henceforth, the LEAP programme should therefore be reviewed to focus its energies on adjusting the amounts upwards to be meaningful for the acquisition of basic assets such as land. Moreover, there should be empowerment of beneficiaries with productive capacities through the incorporation of skills and capability development. This will enhance beneficiary households to initiate new or strengthen old livelihood sources to ensure livelihood sustainability. Enrolling the LEAP beneficiary caregivers who are not working in a skilled training programme that exist in communities to equip them with livelihood skills, which can be used for livelihood activities such as baking and soap making will reduce beneficiaries' dependence on the LEAP cash. This approach is a more reliable and a sustainable way of providing livelihood for beneficiaries and in the long run prevent over dependency on the LEAP by its beneficiaries.

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